

*Eight-Year Program Review IBHE Report Summary***PROGRAM REVIEW REPORT SUMMARY**

1. **Reporting Institution** Eastern Illinois University
2. **Program Reviewed** M.S. in Human Services
3. **Date** February 9, 2023
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5. OVERVIEW

The M.S. in Human Services (formerly the M.S. in Family and Consumer Sciences/ M.S. in Human Services Program Administration) is an integral program housed in the College of Health and Human Services' Department of Human Services. The University, Graduate School, and Departmental missions are solidly aligned in purpose, values, and goals and reflect embodiment of: commitment to diversity, social justice, and inclusion; opportunities for student-faculty scholarship; applied learning experiences; student-centeredness; responsible citizenship and professional leadership; and empowerment of individuals, families, and communities across the lifespan.

Similar programs exist at Northern Illinois University, University of Illinois-Springfield, and University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Our program is distinguished by: 1) an applied and experiential focus on human and social services; 2) two degree options of fully online or hybrid; 3) maximum flexibility and accessibility (e.g., part- and full-time options, year-round application acceptance and admissions, degree completion time); and 4) financial commitment to support students (e.g., professional development funds, scholarships/awards).

Our student learning objectives align with the University's goals of graduate education and provide a core foundation for students' career specialization and advancement, certification and credentialing, professional and leadership development, and preparation for advanced scholarship in human services programs to improve quality of life for individuals, families and communities throughout the lifespan. Specifically, our objectives include demonstration of: content knowledge of lifespan human development, leadership in family life education, applied theory, family/public policy, and human diversity; critical thinking skills in relation to human services; effective written and oral communication; understanding of research planning and evaluation, using quality research as rationale and justification for human services programming, and application of research to practice in working with individuals, families, and communities; and understanding of and adherence to ethical practice (e.g., compliance, confidentiality, mandated reporting, non-discriminatory practices).

Significant program changes include implementation of: degree program and name/focus change; joining a new College of Health and Human Services; a fully online option; a new accelerated graduate program; restructured capstone experience; a new Second Master's Degree program; increased recruitment strategies; revised learning objectives and assessment measures; and increased professional development opportunities for students.

Examples of student achievements include: Hamand Society Scholars honors, Distinguished International Student Award, Research/Creative Activity Grants, Williams Travel Grants, Graduate Student Advisory Council executive board positions, a new Student Ambassadors program, and increased presentations at local/state/national/international levels. Faculty have now received every competitive award offered by the Graduate School. Examples of faculty achievements include: Hamand Fund for Innovation in Graduate Studies Award, Graduate School Diversity Promotion Grant, Raney Outstanding Graduate Faculty Mentor Award, Hanner Teaching Excellence Award, and external grants from the IL Science and Energy Innovation Foundation and Dana and Christopher Reeve Foundation, and executive board leadership service.

Future plans include: implementing additional recruitment strategies, exploration of feasibility of specialized options areas; more enhanced/intentional alumni engagement; and additional interdisciplinary collaborations with other graduate programs in the College of Health and Human Services.

6. MAJOR FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

a.

(1) The human services field is constantly changing. As community and social service needs evolve, new trends in offering services emerge and graduate programs must remain current on how to best serve and support individuals, families, and communities. Current trends shaping human services include integration of human services and healthcare, utilization of data-driven approaches to program assessment and delivery, increase in technology and virtual programs, equality and inclusive accessibility, and formation of historically non-traditional partnerships with other human services organizations. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022) projects overall employment in community and social service occupations to grow 10 percent from 2021 to 2031, faster than the average for all occupations. This increase is expected yield about 294,600 new jobs. In addition to new jobs, opportunities will arise from attrition of professionals who leave their occupations. About 318,400 openings each year, on average, are projected to come from growth and replacement needs.

(2) The current program and course configurations are responsive to the needs of our student demographic. Many students are non-residential and have personal, family, or work obligations outside of their graduate program. Thus, having the online option and all courses regularly offered online has benefited students. The majority of our students are online, and online delivery helps recruitment and retention. To successfully continue recruitment, retention, and academic performance levels, Human Services will continue to offer a high-quality graduate degree program with accessibility, flexibility, and affordability. These key considerations assist in guiding program efforts and initiatives. At present, we will continue to offer face to face classes and hybrid options to support residential or International Students.

(3) Policies, programs, production and provision of services will enable human services to continually adapt to changing family and societal circumstances, increase service accessibility, and remove restrictive service barriers for individuals and families at community, domestic, and global levels. Human services is vital to optimal policies and programs optimal for all individuals and families at all levels of society. Examples of prevalent societal needs/issues related to human services include: available and affordable quality childcare; healthcare reform; abuse and neglect prevention/intervention for children, older adults, and persons with disabilities; foster care and adoption; addiction; domestic/intimate partner/acquaintance violence; caregiving; family leave; poverty and financial resource management; and marriage equality.

(4) As described in #5, the M.S. in Human Services fully aligns with the University's mission. Human Services is a logical fit for our faculty, staff, and students to be an integral component of the interdisciplinary College of Health and Human Services. Our curriculum and program, research/creative activity, and community and other professional service outreach align with the College's promotion of health and well-being of diverse populations across the lifespan. Our current faculty composition changed after the transition from Family and Consumer Sciences to Human Services and all present faculty have background degree and experiential expertise in Human Services specializations. In recent years, the University has approved new annually contracted and tenure-track searches. We will be actively exploring opportunities to grow our faculty ranks along with continuing to bolster our recruitment and enrollment of new students, especially with existing and upcoming programs like the accelerated graduate program, second master's degree program, and prior learning assessment program.

(5) We will continue to promote the National Council on Family Relation's Certified Family Life Education (CFLE) Credential, as our curriculum affords students the option of being prepared for the credentialing exam. Certified Family Life Educators engage in professional practice of equipping and empowering family members to develop knowledge and skills that enhance well-being and strengthen interpersonal relationships through an educational, preventive, and strengths-based approach. Similarly, students are prepared through course content and existing/well-established community-departmental partnerships for establishing or launching careers and/or certifications through CASA, ICASA, and ICADV. The Court Appointed Special Advocacy (CASA) program serves children and youth traumatized and displaced in the foster care and related systems by providing one consistent, caring volunteer advocate, trained to address each child's needs in the court and community. Our local Sexual Assault Counseling and Information Service (SACIS) under the umbrella of the Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault (ICASA) offers career opportunities and certification in Sexual Violence Prevention. Our local HOPE of East Central Illinois under the umbrella of the Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV) offers career opportunities and certification in Intimate Partner Violence Prevention. All such certifications transfer with maximum seamlessness to nearly all states for students wishing to relocate, and professional competencies in these service delivery specializations are ones that transfer easily to other Human Services career pathways.

b. All learning objectives listed in paragraph three of item 5 above are annually assessed with between two and four measures, respectively. Evaluation rubrics are designed for each measure with a 3-point Likert rating scale with scoring of Highly Competent (3), Competent (2), and Unsatisfactory (1). Assignment percentage grades are also used as a measure. Direct measures include capstone assignments/evaluation rubrics in three courses: HSL 5850 Theories of Human Development and Family Life (Theoretical Application Paper); HSL 5900 Research Methods (Research Proposal Presentation); and HSL 5846 Public Policy and Grant Writing for Human Services Programming (Fundraising Simulation Project). These three courses were selected because all are required core courses and reflect the foundational tenets of graduate education: theory, research, and application to professional practice. Additional direct measures include: a written paper and a presentation at the culmination of the required program capstone experience (internship or independent or thesis) and each has an evaluation rubric. The final direct measure is the CITI Program, an online training on the protection of human subjects.

Students are consistently meeting and exceeding performance benchmarks. Benchmarks include: 85% of students are expected to demonstrate competency (rating of 2) on the respective assignments and capstone paper and presentation; 85% of students are expected to earn a grade of 85% or higher on the designated course assignment; and 100% of students are expected to complete the CITI training (also a required assignment in HSL 5900 Research Methods). Based on our most recent assessment report (AY 2021-2022), 100% of HSL 5850 students met the benchmarks (81% exceeded); 90% of HSL 5900 students met or exceeded the benchmarks; and 92% of HSL 5846 students met or exceeded the benchmarks. For students completing their capstone experiences of an internship or independent study in AY 2021-2022, 100% of students met or exceeded the benchmarks. No students chose the thesis option during this year. For the CITI training, 100% of students earned a certificate of completion.

The assessment communication feedback loop (advisor-student communication, individual and faculty group discussions of course assessment progression and outcomes) is the over-arching strength and allows for all faculty/staff/administrators to be aware of strengths and weaknesses. Noted strengths included mastery and comprehension of applying research and theory to better understand human behaviors and dynamics in family case scenarios in HSL 5850; significant learning growth and confidence (as evidenced by research proposal presentation scores) through a “building blocks” approach in HSL 5900 (a course where students tend to experience greater trepidation at the start of the semester); and critical and creative thinking abilities (as evidenced by fundraising simulation project scores) in developing a project mirroring current or future career roles and responsibilities of budgeting and fund development. Additional strengths were successes (as evidenced by rating scores/completion rates) of the internships and independent studies. Partnerships and relations with external site workplaces have a long mutually beneficial and collaborative history within our department. With mentoring and guidance (e.g., weekly progress reports to faculty supervisor), students are allowed a significant amount of autonomy and choice for where and how their capstone experiences evolve and best benefit and align with their individual human services career goals. Paper and presentation outcomes reflect high competency in applying comprehensive course content knowledge to professional practice and individually designed projects. Noted weaknesses included some difficulty in adhering to APA guidelines (e.g., formatting, citations) and some deficiencies in writing ability combined with not taking advantage of instructor feedback and campus and online writing resources. These cases are more isolated outliers. When and if students experience difficulties with courses or capstone experiences, our experience (especially in recent years) is that those are largely due to challenges (e.g., mental health struggles, family problems) outside of the classroom/academic environment that negatively impact academic performance.

Changes have included: increased benchmarks from 80% to 85%; included of assignment scores; included CITI training; replaced “traditional” comprehensive exam with addition of a culminating paper and presentation in the capstone experience; added - and then deleted within several years - a statistics course (resumed statistics as a major module in the Research Methods course); renamed some courses to include “Human Services” in the title for more descriptive accuracy on transcripts and assist students in articulating course names/descriptions/human services intersection to employers; evaluated all graduate course descriptions and required versus elective courses and made modifications accordingly; set course rotation plan to support students’ degree time-to-completion (degree can be completed in one calendar year) and consistency in advisement of students; temporarily removed indirect measures (student and site supervisor midterm and final progress evaluations) tied to internships to revise measures; aligned all objectives with Graduate School revised goals; increased intentional mentoring (with success) of students regarding adaptation of their major course assignments into presentations at EIU’s Graduate Expo and the Illinois Council on Family Relations state conference; and launched a “Building Community” one-on-one and group outreach approach with students to support retention and students’ balance of graduate school with external challenges and constraints.

Upcoming changes are planned for: exploring inclusion of assessment data from major assignments in all six required graduate core courses; returning indirect measures of student and site supervisor midterm and final evaluation data to assessment report; revising the 3-point Likert scale to a 5-point for more precise data; exploring/implementing formative and summative program evaluations by students (exit interviews used to be conducted by a centralized system and now individual departments conduct their own); developing a more prescribed/uniform approach of when/how faculty report concerns of academic integrity, student misconduct, or other issues to the Graduate Coordinator/Department Chair (a model resembling the University’s Early Alert report); and continuing to increase promotion and recruitment related to graduate program, accelerated graduate program, and second master’s degree program.

c. Since the last review, actions (including instructional resources and practices, curricular) taken have included:

- Modifying, revising, streamlining (while still capturing core knowledge assessment), and aligning with changes in Graduate School's learning goals;
- Changing degree name and focus from the broader generalized discipline of Family and Consumer Sciences to a more recognized and specialized degree of Human Services;
- Implementing a fully online degree option and offering more online/hybrid choices to students;
- Evolving technology skills and aptitude of incoming students and online, technology-delivered and -enhanced courses;
- Faculty's encouragement of student scholarship has evolved to more intentionally inviting and integrating students into presentation/dissemination opportunities and collaborative scholarly works;
- Increasing student learning outcome benchmarks and expectations, especially as there is greater awareness and understanding of the complexities faced by individuals, families, and communities served by the human services field;
- Shifting student demographics (increase of first generation students, students of color, international students, financially independent students, older age cohorts, full-time working students, students with intergenerational family obligations, growth in student mental health concerns) and department faculty, staff, and administrators following suit with attuned responsiveness, greater cultural competencies, and support;
- Eliminating "one size fits all" cohort models as student demographics shifted and greater attention was given to individualization, flexibility, and accessibility in working with students and their degree plans of studies;
- Developing the accelerated graduate program as an opportunity for undergraduates to share up to 9 credit hours to be counted toward undergraduate and graduate degrees to allow students more affordability and accessibility while supporting departmental recruitment and retention efforts; and
- Developing the second master's degree program as an opportunity for graduate students to share up to 12 credit hours between two graduate degree programs, again allowing students more affordability and accessibility and while supporting departmental recruitment and retention efforts.

d. Actions (including instructional resources and practices, curricular) to be taken as a result of this review include:

- Implementing new, more creative, and/or larger-scale recruitment strategies
- Exploring feasibility of specialized options in certain areas, such as Child and Adolescent Development, Financial Literacy, Child/Family Welfare;
- Implementing formative and/or summative graduate program evaluation surveys by students
- Enhancing and increasing alumni engagement;
- Establishing more interdisciplinary collaborations with other graduate programs in the College of Health and Human Services;
- Offering Adolescence and the Family course as elective rather than a requirement, as not all students seek to work with the adolescent/young adult population;
- Increase engagement and collaboration with external workforce stakeholders to best insure desired and needed competencies and skills of students are aligned with students' graduate learning environment; and
- Pursuing additional tenure-track faculty line(s) to replace personnel losses due to retirements and transitions to administrative positions.

Comments from the College Dean:

This document is the program's first full report since the MS in Human Services transitioned from Family and Consumer Sciences and into the College of Health and Human Services. The program is to be commended for the seemingly flawless transition of the degree program name and focus change. The required courses and learning objectives for the capstone experience project align the University's graduate education goals. In the last several years, the Department has revised their required capstone experience to enhance scholarly rigor and consistency, and 100% of students met or exceeded the benchmarks. The program has continued to be successful in increasing a diverse student population by ensuring accessibility through online and face to face delivery formats, as well as giving the students options to attend part-time or full-time. The successful adaptation of the accelerated program, creation of Second Master's Degree study plans, consideration of option or focus areas, partnerships with national and local organizations illustrate ongoing efforts for recruitment. The program's community partnerships and capstone experiences provide experiential learning opportunities, and student achievements provide evidence of faculty mentoring and successes with student engagement in research, creative activity, and professional development; each of these things are critical to student retention and job placement in the field of human services. As this summary report indicates, the program plans to develop program assessment by implementing formative and/or summative graduate program evaluation surveys. Based on current issues and trends, the program's recent efforts, current strategies, and action plans in place, it is expected that the MS in Human Services program will continue to be successful and grow in the next several years.

We recommend a decision of Program in Good Standing.

VPAA Decision:

- Program in good standing
- Program flagged for priority review
- Program enrollment suspended

VPAA Explanation:

Human Services, M.S.

The summary above describes the Human Services M.S. program's transition toward a more tightly organized and yet flexible curriculum that better serves today's students. Since its journey from Family and Consumer Sciences, the program has been retooling its recruitment strategies, strengthening its professional partnerships, both internal (other College of Health and Human Services programs) and external (community organizations), and implementing a new assessment plan (identifying assignments in required courses and bolstering its summative experience). The program has also created new pathways for student success, including the accelerated graduate program, the second master's degree program, and the fully online degree option.