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**Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs**

500 Montgomery Street, Suite 350 • Alexandria, VA 22314 • (703) 535-5990 • www.cacrep.org

March 11, 2025

Ms. Sheila Gestring, MBA  
Office of the President  
University of South Dakota  
136 Slagle Hall  
414 East Clark Street  
Vermillion, South Dakota 57069

Dear President Gestring:

The Board of Directors (“Board”) of the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) met February 6-8, 2025, for the purpose of making accreditation decisions. Two counseling specialty areas housed in the School of Education at the University of South Dakota were reviewed under the 2016 CACREP Standards. The Board made the following decisions:

**Clinical Mental Health Counseling (M.A. degree)**

*Defer decision on reaffirmation of accreditation. The Board issued a notice of concern and extended the current grant of accreditation to October 31, 2026\* – Progress Report due by May 15, 2026*

**School Counseling (M.A. degree)**

*Defer decision on reaffirmation of accreditation. The Board issued a notice of concern and extended the current grant of accreditation to October 31, 2026\* – Progress Report due by May 15, 2026*

*The University of South Dakota offers the Clinical Mental Health Counseling and School Counseling specialty areas via a hybrid delivery method consisting of both in-person courses (which utilize some digital components to enhance the in-person instruction) and digitally delivered courses (less than 50% of the curriculum).*

*\* The October 31, 2026, date reflects a progress report submission by May 15, 2026. If the program submits the report earlier, the Board will review it at their next regularly*

*scheduled meeting. If the Board grants reaffirmation of accreditation, it will decide on the accreditation cycle end date at that time.*

The Board issued a notice of concern based on an extensive review of the self-study documents, the site visit team's report, and the institution's response to the site visit team's report. The Board decided to continue the current grant of accreditation and issue the notice of concern rather than issue a new grant of accreditation at this time, due to the indicators during the review of noncompliance or potential noncompliance with multiple standards. These requirements were not only applicable to the review for reaffirmation of accreditation, but to the current grant as well. The Board indicated the notice of concern was particularly tied to the compliance issues related to multiple standards cited for Section 4 of the standards, addressing requirements for program evaluation and student assessment.

As indicated above, the Board has continued the program's current accreditation with a notice of concern. The counseling program must submit a progress report addressing improvements in its policies and practices relative to compliance with the accreditation standards cited starting on page 3 of this letter. The report should be completed in CACREP's [accreditation management system](#) (AMS) using the 2016 Standards Progress/Interim Report template and should be submitted via the AMS no later than **May 15, 2026**. Further information on the accreditation management system is available [here](#).

The Board will review the progress report at its next regularly scheduled meeting and determine whether the identified areas of noncompliance have been adequately addressed. If the Board determines the areas of noncompliance with the standards have not been adequately addressed, the Board will initiate additional actions at that time, including possibly imposing a sanction or requiring the program to show cause why the program's accreditation should not be revoked. If the program can successfully demonstrate compliance with the cited standards, the Board will then determine whether to issue a new grant of accreditation.

Please note that per CACREP's public notice requirements, all accreditation and monitoring decisions are public information. As such, the decision will be indicated in the CACREP Directory of Accredited Programs. Thank you for your continued support of the counseling program as it works to address the issues noted in this letter.

Sincerely,



M. Sylvia Fernandez, Ph.D.  
President and CEO

cc: Dr. Amy Schweinle, Dean, School of Education  
Dr. Gabrielle Strouse, Chair, Department of Counseling and Psychology in Education  
Dr. Adam Hardy, CACREP Liaison

## Standards to be Addressed in the Progress Report

### Section 1. The Learning Environment

#### Standard K

The program did not provide evidence that the academic unit makes continuous and systematic efforts to attract, enroll, and retain a diverse group of students and to create and support an inclusive learning community. The site review team indicated that while the program evidenced in the review materials and during the visit that there are institutional efforts in these areas, the program had not evidenced continuous and systematic efforts specific to the academic unit or how the academic unit connects to these institutional efforts at the academic unit level. The Board indicated that it was unclear how the supporting documentation the program provided in the institution's response to the site review team's report addressed these requirements in relation to students. One of the documents was an email that described two initiatives related to faculty. The others were faculty meeting agendas and while some information was highlighted, the Board indicated it was unclear what these items were and how they pertained to or evidenced continuous and systematic efforts by the academic unit to attract, enroll, and retain a diverse group of students and to create and support an inclusive learning community.

#### Standard Q

The program did not provide evidence that the academic unit makes continuous and systematic efforts to retain a diverse faculty to create and support an inclusive learning community. As indicated in the citation above for Standard 1.K, while there are retention efforts and initiatives at the institutional level, the program had not evidenced continuous and systematic faculty retention efforts specific to the academic unit or how the academic unit connects to these institutional efforts at the academic unit level.

### Section 2. Professional Identity

#### Standard B

The program did not provide evidence that the program objectives (2) reflect input from all persons involved in the conduct of the program, including counselor education program faculty, current and former students, and personnel in cooperating agencies. The program indicated in the institution's response to the site review team's report that the program's objectives had been revised and that a process for reviewing and obtaining feedback in the future had been developed and written into the *Faculty Handbook*. The program needs to provide clarification and evidence pertaining to how the program solicited and included feedback from the stated groups in the revision process. Additionally, the Board noted that the process outlined in the *Faculty Handbook* does not reference soliciting feedback from faculty or former students.

#### Standards F.1-8

The program did not provide evidence demonstrating where and how the program covers the content specified in the standards listed below in the required curriculum. A summary statement related to the content is provided below. Please see the full text of the individual standard for the specific content that must be covered.

- F.1.h Current Labor Market Information
- F.5.i Measurable Client Outcomes
- F.8.f Research Methods
- F.8.g Research and Program Evaluation Designs
- F.8.h Statistical Methods
- F.8.i Analysis and Use of Data

### Section 4. Evaluation in the Program

#### Standard A

The program did not provide evidence that the documented, empirically based plan for systematically evaluating the program objectives, including student learning, includes (4) an explanation for how data will be used for curriculum and program improvement. The program provided an Annual Evaluation Plan

Document that is essentially an attestation that the program faculty will review the information. This document and the other documentation provided do not provide evidence that the program's evaluation plan has been updated to include the requisite explanation for how data, outlined in the plan, will be used for curriculum and program improvement. Additionally, the Board noted that the narrative response in the institution's response to the site review team's report and the Nuventive Report included as documentation, only addresses CPCE scores, internship evaluations, and annual student review outcomes, and does not address other data elements specified for inclusion in the plan and in Standard B.

### **Standard B**

The program did not provide evidence that it uses the following to evaluate the program objectives: (2) demographic and other characteristics of applicants, students, and graduates; and (3) data from systematic follow-up studies of graduates, site supervisors, and employers of program graduates. The program indicates in the institution's response to the site review team's report that it has a plan for addressing these requirements but has not yet implemented the plan. The program needs to provide evidence it has implemented this plan or some other method for satisfying the requirements cited for this standard.

### **Standard D**

The program did not provide evidence that the counselor education program disseminates an annual report that includes, by program level, (1) a summary of the program evaluation results, (2) subsequent program modifications, and (3) any other substantial program changes. The report must be published on the program website in an easily accessible location, and students currently in the program, program faculty, institutional administrators, and personnel in cooperating agencies (e.g., employers, site supervisors) must be notified that the report is available. The program referenced in the institution's response to the site review team's report, the addition of a "View Student Outcomes and Objectives" button to the inside of the CACREP card under the "Known for Excellence" section of the program web page. When the Board located and tried to access that information, the link took them to a site external to the University of South Dakota and titled "SPORTS management degree hub: The Top 10 Best Online Masters in Kinesiology Degree Programs" (<https://www.sportsmanagementdegreehub.com/top/online-masters-kinesiology-degree-programs/>).

### **Standard E**

The program did not provide evidence that the counselor education program annually posts on the program's website in an easily accessible location the following specific information for each entry-level specialty area: (1) the number of graduates for the past academic year, (2) pass rates on credentialing examinations, (3) completion rates, and (4) job placement rates. Similar to the response provided for Standard D, when the Board located and tried to access the link referenced in the institution's response to the site review team's report, the link took them to a site external to the University of South Dakota and titled "SPORTS management degree hub: The Top 10 Best Online Masters in Kinesiology Degree Programs" (<https://www.sportsmanagementdegreehub.com/top/online-masters-kinesiology-degree-programs/>).