Welcome to the 2008 – 2009 Academic Year

Welcome students to another year of learning, challenge and fun. I hope that everyone’s semester has gotten off to a wonderful start. I want to thank CSI for all the work they did on the picnic – it was a very tasty event. I also appreciate all the planning they are doing to help make this a great year for all of our students.

I am pleased to report that the department is healthy and vibrant. As you all know we have received CACREP certification through October 31, 2016. You should all feel pleased that you are part of a department that is viewed so positively by our national accrediting body.

While we are delighted to have the CACREP review behind us, we have no intention of coasting through these next 8 years. This fall we will be reviewing our community counseling program which will be expanded to 60 credits to meet New York State licensure requirements. While we are proud of what we have been, and who we are, we hope to always learn and improve as we move forward.

One of our department’s central values is our common concern for our students. Learning, growth and development – for all of us – occurs within multiple contexts and relationships. I encourage you to reach out to each other as well as to all the faculty and staff of the Counseling Department. While we recognize that our programs are rigorous and challenging, we also want the department to be a place of fun and support.

Have a great semester!

Dennis Gilbride, Ph.D.
CHS Department Chair

Every eight years, CACREP requires accredited programs to undergo a total review. Our process began more than one year ago and ended this July. The process can feel daunting. At the same time, it’s a wonderful opportunity to take a look at what we do and how well we do it.

The first step in accreditation is the preparation of a self-study. This is a written document that includes our explanation of how we believe we meet each of the standards for each of our CACREP programs. This includes information about courses taught, faculty who teach them, sites we use for practicum and internship, reactions of our graduates and their employers to our programs, and so on. Once the CACREP Board reviews the self-study, they make a decision about our readiness for a site visit. We received a positive decision about the site visit and our visiting team arrived this past March. The team is made up of counselor educators and professionals whose job is to “verify” the self-study. This means they need to interview faculty, students, alumni, administrators, and site supervisors to get a good sense of what we’re about. The team arrived on a Sunday night and concluded their work on Wednesday morning.

The last thing the visiting team does is an exit interview. At that time they give the program a sense of their impressions (though we don’t know their final recommendation to the CACREP Board). The team had lots of nice things to say about what they saw during their visit. They were very complimentary about the quality of our students, the faculty, kinds of clinical experiences our students receive, our strong Chi Sigma Iota chapter, and an exceptionally strong doctoral program. They also had some helpful recommendations.

Once the team leaves campus, they submit their report to the CACREP Board. We were sent a copy of the report and learned they saw as meeting all 288 standards. We were thrilled!! We then had to wait for the Board to meet and make their decision. That happened in July and the news could not have better. We received a full eight years accreditation for each of the five CACREP programs (four at the masters level and the doctoral program). Our next review will be in 2016.

CACREP can feel distant to the average student. But there are several advantages to graduating from an accredited program. First and foremost, our students know we have been measured against a national standard and been assessed favorably. More pragmatically, however, national accreditation makes mobility easier. Many licensure laws (including New York’s) reflect a CACREP curriculum. Therefore, hurdles are often lowered for graduates of CACREP programs. Also, though not directly evident, CACREP, along with NBCC and ACA, work with other entities to promote the profession of counseling and to advocate for graduate training programs in general. CACREP also provides faculty of counseling programs a national forum to discuss what is important for our students to learn. All in all, though a good deal of work for programs that seek accreditation, we think it’s more than worth it.
Alumni Corner: Hard Work Pays Off
By: Kelly M. Virkler, M.S.

After the exciting speed race to complete my community counseling internship hours, I felt apprehensive about the impending job search. I sent out many resumes, actively job searching. What I found out was many jobs require licensure or two to three years of experience. Thus, I faced disappointment and frustration. However, patience and perseverance paid off. I was able to get an interview with Community Health and Behavioral Services (CHBS) division of Upstate Cerebral Palsy. I was astonished by how helpful the employees at CHBS were in helping me connect with the New York State Office of Professions to gain a temporary license under which I could bill insurance companies for my services. I had a handful of people backing me up and I wasn’t even working for them yet!

Now that I’m an employee, I can tell you the atmosphere is wonderful. I work with all ages and diagnoses, counseling both families and individuals. I work closely with treatment teams and other professionals in the field.

I am glad I chose to stay and find a job in New York. I have roots and connections here. It is comforting to have a job in a city where I know my way around and can network with the people and places I have worked with during my masters practicum and internship. One of the best parts about being in the professional workplace is finally receiving a paycheck. I was lucky to find a job with amazing pay, benefits and culture. I am sad to think I’m not a SU student anymore, but have realized, in an abstract way, that I will always be a student; I will be learning as I go. I will never forget my classes, friends and faculty that helped lead me to where I am today, but I do have to say that it is great to be done!

For those students still working toward the finish line, I can only say that despite how stressful it gets, it will be worth it in the end. If you have connections, use them! Keep networking to see what else is out there. Do not be deterred by a difficult job search. Know that being overwhelmed and exhausted is completely normal. Enjoy that you are getting an education from one of the best programs in the country and do not give up!

Kelly M. Virkler, ’08, is a Mental Health Professional at United Cerebral Palsy, Community Health and Behavioral Services

Book Review: Beautiful Boy: A father’s journey through his son’s addiction
By: Christine Fisher

“When Nic was growing up, I thought I would be content with whatever choices he made in his life... Now I live with the knowledge that, never mind the most modest definition of a normal or healthy life, my son may not make it to twenty-one.”

The book Beautiful Boy: A father’s journey through his son’s addiction is a memoir written by David Sheff chronicling his son Nic’s severe addiction to methamphetamine and heroin. I found it interesting the book was written from the perspective of a parent of a drug addict, as most of the books I have read regarding addiction have been written by the addicts themselves. Knowing I would soon be starting my practicum at a chemical dependency clinic, I thought it would be interesting to read an account of addiction from this unique point of view.

Beautiful Boy grew out of an article in the New York Times Magazine that drew a large response from readers who were grateful that Sheff was finally giving a voice to the devastating experience they shared. Sheff writes about becoming “addicted to Nic’s addiction” and the obsessive worry that took a toll on many aspects of his life, including his health, marriage, profession and two younger children.

By writing this memoir, Sheff not only provides an account people can relate to, but also numerous sources of information regarding addiction and more specifically methamphetamine, a drug which has become increasingly problematic in the United States over the last 20 years. At the conclusion of the book, Sheff lists a variety of resources including manuscripts, articles and Web sites that may be helpful to anyone dealing with the harsh realities of drug addiction.

I would suggest this book to anyone interested in learning more about addiction and the influence it has, not only on the addict, but on the family members and friends who try desperately to get them help. This memoir would be helpful for counseling students in any setting because substance abuse is a topic many of us will be faced with while working with clients. Although the topic is very emotional and intense, Beautiful Boy is an insightful, comforting, educational and well-written book I would highly recommend.

Additionally, for anyone interested, Tweak: Growing up on methamphetamines, is the other side of this story. Tweak is a personal account of the experiences and struggles that Nic Sheff went through both in relapsing as well as his subsequent recovery process; one in which he continues to work on each day.
As I enter my second year at Syracuse University, one of the most rewarding, yet challenging parts of the program for me has been clinical supervision. The purpose of clinical supervision is to provide individual support and feedback to a supervisee, with the goal of helping him/her grow both personally and professionally. Additionally, it is also part of the supervisor’s responsibility to safeguard a supervisee’s clients, making sure that their needs are being taken care of appropriately and that they are not in any foreseeable danger to themselves or others.

For the past two semesters I have had the opportunity to provide supervision for several of the CHS department masters students. Throughout these semesters, I found a very interesting personal parallel as my supervisees’ skills and confidence grew: their growth helped push me to grow as a supervisor. Also, as the majority of my experience comes from working as a school counselor, I found it challenging to supervise masters students who were placed in non-school settings, for they were working with clients and clinical issues outside my normal scope of work and experience. Providing supervision to those students also helped to broaden my supervision skills and continued to foster my own growth as a supervisor.

What I like most about being a supervisor is the challenge of trying to conceptualize what is going on for my supervisee, his/her client, and myself at each moment during supervision. I end up having to wear a variety of hats – being the teacher one moment, counselor the next and a consultant in the third. When all of the components of supervision are blended together, a powerful cognitive and emotional, personal and professional learning experience is formed for both the supervisee and the supervisor. I have learned as much from my supervisees as they have learned from me.

Finally, it is also personally rewarding to watch a supervisee, who in many cases is acting publicly in the role of a counselor for the first time, grow in skills and confidence throughout the semester. Many times we start off struggling with basic conceptualization skills and the nervousness everyone feels when he/she starts working with “real” clients. By the end of the semester the change is amazing; it is especially apparent when we go back and listen to one of the supervisee’s first tapes.

Each week during the semester, I look forward to the time I get to spend doing supervision. I look forward to getting the opportunity to learn more about my supervisees and hopefully forming connections with some of the special people that make up our masters students.

CHS Department Orientation: A First-Year’s Experience
By: Rachel Polansky

Just as one would expect from experienced counseling students and faculty, first-year counseling graduate students were welcomed with open arms, open minds and smiling faces to the 2009 Department of Counseling and Human Services orientation. For many first years, including myself, the orientation was our second preview of the program; second-year Chi Sigma Iota masters students serve as mentors for incoming counseling students each year. This year, mentors informed their first years about program requirements, classes, culture and faculty members. They also cued us into the best restaurants and recreation spots in the Syracuse area. Mentors offered themselves as resources for academic help and social networking.

Similarly, members and representatives of the Chi Sigma Iota counseling honors society offered their services during the orientation. After a meeting with advisors, first years were given a chance to ask questions of the Chi Sigma Iota panel in a less formal atmosphere. Questions ranged from how to get a graduate assistantship to parking concerns for main campus classes. The panel answered the questions and created a comfortable atmosphere for students to express their anxieties and concerns.

To further the Q & A session and foster new relationships, Chi Sigma Iota members invited all the first years to join them at Rachel’s, a restaurant in the Syracuse Sheraton Hotel across the street from the CHS Department. First and second-year students who accepted the invitation were given the chance to interact with one another in relaxed, comfortable setting. While academic and logistic questions did arise, the conversations were friendly and social. The second years did their part in making the new graduate students feel welcome to their program, school and city. The mentor program, orientation and social gathering were absolutely successful from a counseling point of view; comfortable, open atmospheres and relationships were created and it seemed that everyone involved had a positive, meaningful experience.
An Interview with Professor Derek Seward
By: Brenda Austin

The Sigma Upsilon chapter of Chi Sigma Iota extends a warm welcome to Professor Derek Seward, the newest faculty member in the Department of Counseling and Human Services at Syracuse University. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to ask him some questions regarding his background, research interests and experience as a professional counselor during his transition into this exciting new role. Please join our chapter in welcoming him to the department!

1. Can you tell us what inspired you to become a professional counselor?
Throughout my life I have had a genuine interest in assisting others. As an undergraduate resident advisor I developed an interest in counseling. Realizing my words could have a profound positive impact on the lives of others, coupled with the deep sense of fulfillment I felt when helping others, enticed me. After learning about the plethora of ways I could help people improve their lives as a professional counselor, I knew counseling was the profession for me.

2. What did you do before you came to Syracuse University?
I received my Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from the University of Rochester. After obtaining my Master of Education in Counseling from Teachers College, Columbia University, I worked as a vocational counselor with individuals recovering from substance abuse in New York City. Most recently, I returned to the University of Rochester where I worked as a visiting assistant professor and am currently completing my doctoral studies.

3. What are your areas of research interest?
My primary research interests lie in the cultural development and preparation of mental health professionals working with diverse cultural populations. In an effort to reform counselor training to better address the learning needs of racial minority students, I am currently investigating minority student perceptions regarding the efficacy of multicultural courses in addressing student learning needs. My secondary research interests lie in HIV/STD prevention research.

4. What attracted you to the Department of Counseling and Human Services at Syracuse University?
The strong focus on student education coupled with a faculty active in scholarship and service attracted me to the department.

5. What has your experience at Syracuse been like so far?
I have been extremely impressed with the faculty, staff and students at SU. Specifically with our department, the balance between academic learning and social interaction has been wonderful.

6. What classes are you teaching in the Fall 2008 semester?
This semester, I am teaching COU 614: Group Work in Counseling.

7. What are your hopes for this academic year?
During this year, I intend to continue building relationships with faculty and students in hopes of contributing to the intellectual, professional and social justice work of our department.

8. Can you tell us a random fact about yourself that we might not otherwise know?
I am an Eagle Scout, which is highest rank obtainable in the Boy Scouts of America.

9. What advice do you have for counselors-in-training today?
To whom much is given, much is expected. As counselors-in-training, you are being given the knowledge and responsibility of improving the lives of others – respect, cherish and revel in the journey, for there is a lot of work ahead to be done.

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CSI Event Pictures

On Sunday, September 7, 2008 members of CSI, the CHS Department and friends gathered at the annual Counseling and Human Services Department Picnic at Jamesville Beach Park.

Dom DiDomenico (2nd year masters student) and Sean Finnerty (2nd year doctoral student) chat over homemade dishes.

Laura Ecker (2nd year masters student), Melissa Luke, Ph.D., and Steve Ball grilling up some great food.

Brenda Austin’s (2nd year masters student) amazing raspberry cheesecake.