The Family Therapy Center

Serving the Community and the Field Since 1979

annual report
2015

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The Center for Family Services, forerunner of the Family Therapy Center, was established in March 1979 as an interdisciplinary training and service facility for what is now the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences. Graduate students in Marriage and Family Therapy and Human Nutrition used the facility for clinical experience in that first year.

Subsequently, the Center focused exclusively on training Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) doctoral students by providing relational therapy to members of the public under clinical faculty supervision. The Center, based in the Department of Human Development, was originally located on Jackson Street, across from the old Armory building, and moved in the mid-1980s to 1601 South Main Street. The Center relocated again in September 1997 to its current site on University City Boulevard, and also changed its name to the Family Therapy Center of Virginia Tech. Traditional services of the Center include family, couple, individual, and other relational therapy, support groups, consulting, and continuing education. These services are targeted primarily to the New River Valley and surrounding communities, with clients coming from as far away as eastern West Virginia, Salem and Roanoke in the east, Craig County in the north, and North Carolina in the south. Services are open to everyone.

The Center has cooperative relationships with Juvenile and Domestic Relations Courts, Social Service departments, private agencies such as Catholic Charities, local churches, mental health agencies, public schools, and international programs such as the MFT program at Beijing Normal University. In the past year, therapists provided almost 1,600 hours of therapy.

The MFT PhD Program, headquartered at the Center, is fully accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE) of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. It files annual reports with the Commission and is visited every six years for reaccreditation. It is the oldest continuously accredited family therapy doctoral program in existence, and has been highly regarded for many years. All Center policies meet COAMFTE standards for doctoral training clinics.

The Family Therapy Center mission is to provide low-cost, high quality psychotherapy to families, couples, and individuals, and to train future leaders in the field. In 2014-2015, the Center provided 1,572 hours of therapy to clients from across the southwest Virginia region.

The Center staff includes a Director, who is also Director of the MFT PhD Program; a Director of Clinical Training; an Internship Coordinator; the Practicum Students, who are the primary clinical therapists for the Center; a Graduate Assistant; the Office Manager, and one or more Undergraduate Interns. Their duties are outlined below. All paid personnel are supported from Human Development department funds. Students and interns are unpaid.

**Center & Program Director** develops and schedules MFT courses, recruits students, organizes interviews and new student selection, develops policies for the MFT program and the Center, oversees program budget, physical facilities, coordination of public relations, and communication and application of accreditation requirements. AAMFT Approved Supervisor, tenure track faculty. Reports to the Human Development Department Head.

**Director of Clinical Training** has overall responsibility for clinical supervision and clinical scheduling, oversight of clinical screening procedures, oversight of statistical reports of supervision and client contact, and assignment of cases through the Center Office Manager. Tenure track faculty. Coordinates with Program Director.

**Coordinator of Internships** has overall responsibility for doctoral internship development and working with students as they select their internship site. This includes maintaining contact with internship sites to ensure quality clinical experiences and to see that all appropriate standards are kept. Tenure track faculty. Coordinates with Program Director.

**Office Manager** handles day-to-day record keeping and maintains contact with practicum students, clients, and referral sources. In addition, the Office Manager orders all department textbooks, handles department teaching evaluations, assists with accreditation data and paperwork, and provides clerical support for all Center faculty and staff. Administrative and Program Specialist III. Reports to the Center/Program Director.

**Clinical Faculty** teach various MFT courses and supervise therapists. Report to the Human Development Department Head.
CENTER STUDENTS

Graduate Assistant to the Director. This position may be filled by one or more graduate assistants in the MFT program. This year’s Graduate Assistant is Xin Quan.

Practicum Students provide therapy under faculty supervision. First and second-year doctoral students see clients in individual, couple, family, and group therapy, supervised by the Clinical Training Director and other clinical faculty. All clinical faculty are department members. Currently, the doctoral students involved in clinical practicum are Renu Aldrich, Ryan Earl, Emily Gary, Saeid Kianpour, and Sara Steelman. First-year students who will start seeing clients in the spring are Jared Ambrose, Katarina Krizova, Michelle Murray, Mary Nedela, Jessica Premo, and Xi Quan. First-year students typically observe therapy sessions and take part in other clinical preparation during the fall term.

Undergraduate Interns assist with various Center operations and may participate in clinical seminars, and observe cases and supervision, as determined by the Director of Clinical Training. Typically, the Center provides placements for two undergraduate interns per term during fall, spring, and summer.

Third-Year Students serve a required off-campus, nine to twelve month internship at various sites around the nation and in Canada. Current interns are Kendra O’Hara, Emily Haugen, and Jamie West. (Yesm Keskin, Dana Riger, and Tina Voskanova have stayed on for a third year as instructors.) During this time they may also be conducting research for their dissertations. Their internship experiences are monitored by the Internship Coordinator.

Fourth-Year Students typically have finished their internships and are completing dissertations. Our current fourth-years are Hoa Nguyen, Ruth Nutting, and Len Sturdivant.

MFT PhD Program Graduates. The Center does not confer degrees. However, the program had four graduates in 2014-2015: Carissa D’Aniello, Stefan Pasymowski, Tenille Richardson-Quamina, and Laura Sudano. Several others are working on their dissertations.

Since 1982, our overall program graduation rate is 85%. Only two minority students in our history have failed to graduate. Nationwide, only a little more than half of all doctoral candidates finish their degrees.

CONTINUING OUTREACH & RESEARCH

Working with Sexual Minority Youth

Project SMYLE is a research project intended to further our understanding of the experiences of sexual minority youth: Sexual Minority Youth’s: Lived Experiences. It is run by our Internship Coordinator, Erika Grafsky, and includes current researcher team members Emily Gary, Michelle Murray, Mary Nedela, and Sarah Steelman, and past student researchers Mary Burns, Hoa Nguyen, Dana Riger, and Emily Haugen.

SYMLE currently involves two projects, To Be or Not to Be Out, and Figuring It Out. To Be or Not to Be Out aims to achieve a deeper understanding of the sexual orientation disclosure decision-making processes of LGBTQ+ youth and young adults. It is actively recruiting LGBTQ+ youth and their parents to take part in this research. Interested parties can contact Erika and the team at VTProjectSMYLE@gmail.com.

Figuring It Out is a community-based, participatory intervention development project to help youth make safe and successful disclosure decisions to family. It brings together the expertise of a variety of primary and secondary stakeholders to collaboratively develop an intervention to help lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer youth make safe and successful disclosure decisions. The developed intervention will be vetted to focus groups of LGBTQ+ youth to obtain their feedback.
Fiscal year 2014-2015 showed the highest revenues in Center history, with income just under $29,000. Intakes averaged 15 per month while annual clinical hours per therapist rose to nearly 200 hours a year, a 41% increase from the previous five year average. Overall, we had 186 intakes in the past fiscal year, the majority coming from our online appointment request system. Hours per new intake also rose significantly from the previous five year average, to eight and a half hours of therapy per case. The average number of Center therapy hours per month likewise rose by about a third, to 131 hours per month.

These increased revenues have gone toward equipment and furniture replacement, software, and are helping us upgrade our digital video system to Hi-Definition. They have also enabled us to provide more support for indigent clients, for interview candidates, and for conference travel for Center students and faculty.

Thirteen years ago, as the fall semester was about to begin, Bud Protinsky, the program director at the time, walked into the Center and announced he was retiring. He’d just met with his accountant, who told him he had enough saved to stop working. Suddenly, I became the new program director.

Unlike that transition, I’ve tried to make my impending retirement next July and Megan Dolbin-MacNab’s taking over as the next program director a little less abrupt. The search for a new faculty member who also will become the Center director is well advanced, with a fine pool of candidates.

I’d like to think the program has improved over the past 13 years, less because of my personal efforts than because of the tremendous talent I’ve been fortunate to work with: Fred Piercy, Megan, Erika, a host of exceptional students, and our fine current department head, Anisa Zvonkovic. It has been a great privilege to work with them all, and they have my every best wish for continued success.