1. Program Overview

The Graduate Program in Rehabilitation Counseling is part of the Department of Human Services and Rehabilitation in the Woodring College of Education at WWU. The Department houses a Bachelor of Arts in Human Services program, a Bachelor of Science in Nursing program, a Master of Education in Continuing and College Education program, and the Master of Arts in Rehabilitation Counseling program. The program is off-campus and is located in Everett, Washington, which is 32 miles north of Seattle and 60 miles south of Bellingham. The program is part of the University Center of North Puget Sound.

The Graduate Program in Rehabilitation Counseling at Western Washington University (WWU) prepares students to become qualified rehabilitation counselors consistent with the requirements of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. A central principle for implementing the services and the mission of the State-Federal Rehabilitation Agencies is to assure the provision of services by qualified rehabilitation counselors. The rehabilitation counseling professional associations, particularly the National Rehabilitation Counseling Association, the American Rehabilitation Counseling Association, and the National Council on Rehabilitation Education, have identified qualified rehabilitation counselors as those who have graduated from Master’s degree programs accredited by CORE and who are Certified Rehabilitation Counselors or are eligible to take the examination.

The Graduate Program in Rehabilitation Counseling at WWU has had a large impact on the availability of rehabilitation education in Washington and the Northwest. The Graduate Program in Rehabilitation Counseling at WWU is seen as an innovative approach to alleviating the shortage of qualified personnel in the field of rehabilitation counseling. This program maximizes the collaboration within the Northwest region by using a hybrid method of course delivery and by creating a dynamic curriculum that creates opportunities for students to intern in rehabilitation counseling agencies, develop awareness of disability advocacy groups, and network with major stakeholders. The state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies have indicated that there are currently 33 openings this year in the 7 agencies in the region (Alaska Combined, Idaho General, Idaho Blind, Oregon General, Oregon Blind, Washington General, and Washington Blind). They also reported a projected 188 openings for the 7 state agencies over the next five years. The capacity of current master’s programs in the region (Western Washington University, Western Oregon University, Portland State University, and University of Idaho) is about 40 graduates per year, of whom not all choose to work in a state agency. This constitutes an increasingly large shortage in the pool of potential applicants that a state agency can access.

The Graduate Program in Rehabilitation Counseling at WWU consists of 72 quarter-hours of coursework, which includes a minimum of 100 hours of supervised practicum and 600
hours of supervised internship. The program’s mission is to prepare dedicated and qualified rehabilitation counselors who will partner with individuals with disabilities to enhance their lives, including self-determination, independence, meaningful employment, and full community participation. Within this context, the Graduate Program in Rehabilitation Counseling at WWU has the following objectives:

- To offer a quality curriculum that prepares master's level rehabilitation counselors with the knowledge and skills necessary to ethically and competently serve individuals with disabilities.
- To recruit and retain qualified students for a viable program that includes persons from racial and cultural minorities and individuals with disabilities.
- To promote a learning community of students from diverse backgrounds that enriches student experience and education and promotes full participation of individuals with disabilities as well as persons from culturally diverse backgrounds.
- To create opportunities for student interaction with individuals with disabilities as well as individuals from culturally diverse backgrounds.

The program is committed to accountability and innovation as well as the following program values.

- Quality Curricula: to design current and relevant curricula that challenge students, develop skills to broaden students’ base of knowledge, and create opportunities for student interaction with individuals from culturally diverse groups as well as individuals with disabilities.
- Student-Oriented Education: to cultivate an educational delivery system that promotes student learning in a flexible and responsive educational environment and supports application of classroom knowledge and competency-based skills to a variety of work environments, resulting in competent professionals.
- Diversity and Equal Access: to cultivate a learning community of students from diverse backgrounds that enriches student learning and promotes full participation of individuals with disabilities as well as persons from culturally diverse backgrounds.
- Professional Leadership and Competence: to design curricula that prepare competent rehabilitation counselors; to impact rehabilitation service delivery systems by preparing professionals who will demonstrate leadership in their organizations and in the field.
- Continuous Program Improvement: to efficiently and effectively enhance the program by utilizing a systematic process of evaluation procedures to insure program effectiveness and efficiency.
- Professional Development: to support professional development of the rehabilitation counseling faculty, which includes excellence in multimodal instruction, community service, rehabilitation-related research, evidence-based practice, and other scholarly endeavors. To support state-of-the-art curriculum development and instruction that reflects our program commitment to the on-going needs of both public and private rehabilitation agencies.
2. Student Recruitment, Enrollment, and Retention

One result of the widespread effort to increase the professionalism and educational levels of rehabilitation counselors working in the State-Federal Rehabilitation Agencies is a need to diversify the ways in which rehabilitation education is provided in order to attract individuals with disabilities, people from traditionally underrepresented groups, and individuals in rural geographical areas. In response to this need, the Graduate Program in Rehabilitation Counseling at Western Washington University (WWU) has a Master of Arts degree program that offers a hybrid model of education that combines traditional face-to-face classes with distance learning courses. By offering evening and distance courses, the program is better able to serve students who might otherwise not be able to complete a graduate program due to disability and/or geographic location. The program implements a comprehensive recruitment plan that is designed to attract qualified applicants, including individuals with disabilities and individual who are members of traditionally underrepresented groups.

Efforts in outreach to underrepresented groups will continue to be a focus of the Graduate Program in Rehabilitation Counseling. This will be accomplished through recruitment goals of applicants who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented based on race, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability. However, when admitting applicants to the program, the basis of evaluation is on academic performance and commitment to the field of rehabilitation counseling and working with individuals with disabilities. Applicants are not admitted solely on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability.

The current hybrid program is attracting students from a 100 mile radius, with some students coming from as far away as 200 miles. By offering evening classes once per week plus an online course every quarter, WWU is able to assist students in a large geographical area to increase their skills and abilities and enter into the rehabilitation counseling profession with a Master of Arts in Rehabilitation Counseling.

The Graduate Program in Rehabilitation Counseling at WWU has been successful in reaching and recruiting students who are members of traditionally underrepresented groups in the rehabilitation counseling profession. Of the 37 current students, about 40% of the students have identified themselves as having a disability and about 32% have identified as having a culturally diverse background. These percentages have been fairly stable over the past several years.

From 1999, the year that the stand-alone program began, until 2010, the full-time plan of study was designed for nine quarters, which included two summer quarters. Since the curriculum revisions completed in 2010, the full-time plan of study is designed for eight quarters, which includes two summer quarters. Based on the data from the WWU Graduate School, the average time-to-degree is between eight and nine terms.

Program faculty meet three times throughout each quarter to discuss student performance, advising, and career counseling; current topics, projects, and assignments in the courses; current and emerging trends in the field; and best practices for rehabilitation counseling education. In addition to these discussions, faculty evaluate each student in their course(s) each quarter based on the Expectations for Academic and Professional Performance. Each RC student agrees to
comply with these standards prior to starting the program by signing a form that is placed in their student file. If there is concern about a particular student, the Academic Program Director (Dr. Elizabeth Boland) will meet with the student to discuss performance and outline a plan for continued success in the program. If a student continues to fail in meeting these standards, the student will be dismissed from the program. The students also self-assess at the end of the first year in the program and have a formal meeting with the Academic Program Director to discuss performance.

The RC Clinical Coordinator (currently Dr. Erica Johnson and will be Dr. Dana Brickham as of 6/16/14) meets with all students two quarters before the start of practicum (which is Summer quarter for most students) to begin the formal process of selecting a practicum site. This includes a mandatory advising appointment. A similar process occurs for internship placements. The RC Clinical Coordinator, in collaboration with the course instructor, will monitor student performance in practicum and internship and will provide support, if needed, to successfully complete the field placement. There may be situations where a field placement is not a good match between the site, the student, and/or the supervisor. If there is no question of a student’s ethical or professional behavior or ability to meet essential functions, students will be allowed to find another placement and continue in field studies.

When a student’s readiness for placement into field studies or when a student’s ability to meet professional performance expectations within a current field studies placement are in question, the situation will be referred for a case conference prior to long-term or permanent restriction or removal from field studies placements, based on the Department of Human Services and Rehabilitation's Case Conference Policy.

3. Student and Alumni Success

During the 2012-2013 academic year, all students met at least the minimum standard for the mid-program assessment (conducted with students during the end of their first year) and all students passed the clinical course (RC 583) with a B or better (which is a requirement prior to completion of practicum).

Completion of the 72-quarter-hour program of study (including practicum and internship) results in the attainment of knowledge, skills, and abilities that are necessary to provide effective rehabilitation counseling services to individuals with disabilities, and prepares the graduate to take the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) national credentialing examination. Since the program began in 1999, there have been 178 graduates. To date, over 90% of the graduates who have applied have received their CRC certification (the national average is 70%).

A total of 15 students graduated from the program in August 2012 and December 2012. All of these students passed the comprehensive examination that is given in the last quarter of the program. Fourteen (93.33%) of the graduates were employed in the field of rehabilitation counseling within the first 6 months following graduation. One graduate is pursuing her Psy.D. degree. Employment settings for graduates include WA State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, ID State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Veteran’s Administration

Rehabilitation Counseling
Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Services, nonprofit community rehabilitation providers, and private agencies providing workers compensation services.

4. Faculty Engagement in Graduate Programs

The faculty for the Graduate Program in Rehabilitation Counseling consists of professionals who are experienced in rehabilitation and counseling as well as teaching at the graduate level. Traditionally, there has been one tenured/tenure-track faculty member, who was also the RC Academic Program Director, with several non-tenure-track faculty members. The program successfully added a second tenure line to the program and a new Assistant Professor will be starting June 16, 2014.

Dr. Elizabeth Boland is an Associate Professor and the RC Academic Program Director. Since 2010, Dr. Boland is also the Chair of the Department of Human Services and Rehabilitation. As the Academic Program Director, she has responsibility for (a) mentoring program faculty, (b) assisting in the development and teaching of rehabilitation counseling courses, (c) recruiting applicants to the RC program, (d) providing academic advising to first-year RC students, (e) informing current students about the availability of RSA scholarships and other available funding sources, (f) conducting ongoing evaluation of students in the RC program and their ability to meet the RC Academic and Professional Performance standards, (g) assisting in the supervision of practicum and internship students, (h) collaborating with other programs on campus, (i) integrating the Graduate Program in Rehabilitation Counseling with the academic framework of Woodring College of Education and Western Washington University, and (j) integrating the WWU program into the cooperative network of the Northwest rehabilitation counseling education programs and State VR agencies. In addition to the Academic Program Director and Department Chair duties, Dr. Boland teaches 2 courses (8 credits) during the academic year and 1 course (4 credits) during the summer in the program.

Dr. Dana Brickham has recently been hired as an Assistant Professor and the RC Clinical Coordinator. In her duties as the RC Clinical Coordinator, she will be responsible for (a) providing academic advising to second-year RC students, (b) working with first-year students to begin plans for practicum and internship, (c) providing guidance to second year students who are choosing practicum and internship placements, and (d) maintaining and expanding practicum and internship opportunities for students. In addition to the Clinical Coordinator duties, Dr. Brickham will be teaching 8 courses (32 credits) during the academic year and 3 courses (12 credits) during the summer in the program; however, she has a 4-credit course reduction for her first year.

The program also includes several part-time faculty members who teach in their specialty area. Dr. Erica Johnson currently has a .86 FTE faculty appointment with the Graduate Program in Rehabilitation Counseling and has served as the program’s Clinical Coordinator (until the end of Spring 2014). This appointment level will be reduced in the 2014-15 academic year due to the tenure-track hire. In addition to Dr. Johnson, there are several highly qualified individuals who also taught in the program as part-time faculty during this past year. These individuals include Dr. Kathe Matrone (Director, Center for Continuing Education in Rehabilitation, University of
Washington), Dr. Roxanna Pebdani (Post-doctoral Fellow at the University of Washington), Dr. Edward Goldenberg (Clinical Professor, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, University of Washington), and Dr. Brett Kuwada (Counselor at Everett Community College).

The RC program faculty meet 3 times per quarter to discuss curriculum issues, disciplinary trends, opportunities, professional development, and student issues. The RC program faculty are also invited to the RC Advisory Committee meetings that are held twice per year.

5. External Reviews

The program is fully accredited by the Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE). The last reaccreditation self-study and site visit was conducted in 2011-2012. The program was granted full accreditation for 8 years (2012-2020), which is the maximum length of accreditation available. The program is required to submit annual reports to CORE, including updating the program outcomes each Fall (https://wce.wwu.edu/sites/wce.wwu.edu/files/RC-ProgramOutcomes.pdf).

Evaluation of the RC program occurs on an ongoing basis by utilizing a systematic process of evaluation procedures to insure program effectiveness and efficiency and the results are incorporated into the design of the program. Information on all areas of the program will be closely monitored, including (a) mission and objectives; (b) curriculum; (c) practicum and internship; (d) program-level student assessments; (e) graduate achievement and employment; (f) recruitment and retention of students; (g) program recognition, support, and resources; and (i) faculty composition, qualifications, and performance. Both internal and external evaluations are used in this process and include current faculty and students, alumni, and advisory committee members.

The Rehabilitation Counseling (RC) Advisory Committee serves in an advisory capacity for the students, staff, and faculty of the Western Washington University Graduate Program in Rehabilitation Counseling by (1) providing feedback regarding local, state, regional, and national trends, needs, and policy changes; (2) acting as an advocate for the RC program; and (3) providing feedback on the current curriculum and proposed curriculum changes. The RC Advisory Committee also serves as an external reviewer for certain areas of the program evaluation plan, including (1) the RC program’s mission and objectives; (2) the curriculum; (3) graduate achievement and employment; (4) recruitment and retention of students; and (5) program recognition, support, and resources. The Advisory Committee includes the Director of Washington State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (WA DVR), the Training Manager for WA DVR, a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor 4 from Washington State Department of Services for the Blind (also program alumnus), the Assistant Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Officer from Seattle Veteran’s Affairs, the Director of the North Intertribal Vocational Rehabilitation Program, the Director of Services at Orion Industries (a community rehabilitation provider), the Owner of a private rehabilitation agency (also program alumnus), the Director of the Center for Continuing Education in Rehabilitation (also an RC Instructor), a Professor in the Rehabilitation Science Doctoral program in the Department of Rehabilitation Medicine at the University of Washington, an Associate Professor in Human Services at WWU,
the Internship Coordinator for Oregon Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, the Chief of Field Services for Idaho Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the training specialist from Alaska Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. The Committee also includes an RC student representative and all meetings are open to any student who wants to attend. The RC Advisory Committee meets twice each year and provides feedback to the RC Academic Program Director regarding current practices and needs in the various agencies. The RC Advisory Committee creates a network for current students and graduates for employment opportunities within the agencies.

6. Resources

The current full-time credit load for probationary and tenured faculty members in the department is 30-32 credits for the academic year. The current full-time credit load for non-tenure-track faculty members in the department is 36-45 credits for the academic year, which is dependent upon the advising and service duties assigned. If non-tenure-track faculty are assigned an advising load or service duties comparable to probationary and tenured faculty members, the load will be 36 credits. Cross-listed or linked course sections count as one course for workload calculation purposes. Graduate courses are counted in the same manner as undergraduate courses. Since the 2 graduate programs within the department are not part of an undergraduate program, there are no stacked courses. There is no distinction between graduate and undergraduate teaching in the Department Evaluation Plan for tenure and promotion.

Per the CORE accreditation standards, faculty have a maximum of 20 advisees, with a current average of 19 students. The Graduate Program in Rehabilitation Counseling is a non-thesis program with a comprehensive examination that is given to all students during their last quarter in the program. Two faculty members participate in these examinations, and with the addition of the tenure-track line, these two faculty members will be the tenure-track/tenured faculty members. The program has a .5 FTE Program Coordinator who supports the faculty and students in the program. The department has a Program Manager and a Program Assistant who support all faculty, mainly in regards to contracting, purchasing, and travel.

Currently, the Graduate Program in Rehabilitation Counseling has a 5-year federal grant from the Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration through August 31, 2015 for $150,000 per year. 75% of those funds are required to support students through tuition and stipends. The remaining 25% is used to cover a percentage of the salary of the RC Academic Program Director, faculty professional development travel, and supplies.

7. TA Position Descriptions

The Graduate Program in Rehabilitation currently does not have any teaching assistants, graduate assistants, or research assistants.
8. Summary Conclusion

The Graduate Program in Rehabilitation Counseling is the only RC program in the state and is one of four in the Northwest Region. A strength of the program is offering the curriculum in a hybrid model with full-time students taking two courses each quarter, which typically includes one face-to-face course and one distance learning course. The hybrid instruction model allows students to attend classes at the Everett campus once per week while concurrently enrolling in an asynchronous Canvas course that they participate in throughout the rest of the week. Another strength of the program is the cohort model of the program. Students are admitted once a year, in the Fall, and take classes as a cohort for 8 quarters. This allows faculty to provide personalized support and advising to assist in retention of students and monitoring of progress towards degree. The cohort model also builds in natural supports within the cohort for students, which assists in retention as well.

In addition to quality academic advising, the program offers an in-depth orientation session for new students and a Student Handbook that provides information on policies, procedures, and services/resources. Registration information and book lists are posted on the program website and emailed to students each quarter (https://wce.wwu.edu/rc/registration-information). Additionally, students receive practicum and internship handbooks that orient them to the clinical facets of their education. Students receive career assistance from clinical supervisors and university instructors who oversee their clinical practice. The WWU Career Center is also available to offer assistance to students via phone, email, or in-person services. Due to strong connections with partner agencies and organizations, the program is informed of local, state, and national employment opportunities. Employment announcements are shared with current and recently graduated students.

As part of the RC program evaluation plan, the mission and objectives are reviewed by the RC Advisory Committee on an annual basis. While the overall intent behind the mission and vision will not change, the wording may change to reflect updated practice issues. The delivery of the program is not anticipated to change. The only potential change would be to include a 90-credit-hour track that would train Clinical Rehabilitation Counselors. This is a new CORE accreditation category and the faculty, in consultation with the RC Advisory Committee, will be evaluating whether this would be a viable addition to the current 72-credit-hour program.

Overall, the quality and current status of the Graduate Program in Rehabilitation Counseling is meeting the needs of both employers and the individuals with disabilities who are accessing services. The faculty are committed to keeping current in the field and to continue to include new and emerging techniques as well as evidence-based practices. Faculty are also committed to ensuring access to main-campus services for Everett-based students by connecting with college and department peers.

There are two CORE accreditation standards (http://core-rehab.org/Files/Doc/PDF/CORE%20Graduate%20Standards%20and%20Self%20Study%20Document-FINAL%2010-2013.pdf) that limit the ratio of students to faculty. Standard E.7 states that the ratio of full-time equivalent (FTE) students to (FTE) faculty should be no greater than 10:1.
Standard E.8 states that the student headcount-to-advisor ratio should be no greater than 20:1. Due to these CORE accreditation standards, the program is at capacity.

One of the main goals over the next several years is to increase the number of WWU undergraduates who matriculate into the Graduate Program in Rehabilitation Counseling. Since the field is diverse, there are no undergraduate prerequisites and no required undergraduate degree. An updated recruiting plan was put in place during late Spring quarter and will be fully implemented for the next recruiting cycle. The recruiting plan includes emailing information to juniors and seniors in select majors at WWU and requesting that WWU disAbility Resources for Students (DRS) emails information to all juniors and seniors who are identified as a student with a disability. One of the downfalls of being off-campus is visibility to main campus undergraduate students.

Based upon this self-evaluation, the results of recent program evaluation results, and conversations with alumni and RC Advisory Committee members, there is a definite need for the Graduate Program in Rehabilitation Counseling at WWU.