One of the key elements of the WCU Counseling Program is the opportunity for the students to practice in the community the skills they have learned in class. Representatives from the program are placed in local schools and community agencies while concurrently taking a class that will examine their progress. This applied learning experience is appropriately labeled practicum. The following paragraphs are a few of the reflections from WCU students who are presently learning through their practicum.

Anticipating practicum was the hardest part. Finally being in the field is actually a relief. For the first couple of times, I just had to make myself get out the door, get to the site and let myself trust that it would all work out to be bigger than my anxiety. Now that I am more relaxed, I am able to really enjoy the work, and I am finding out how much I really respect my client’s amazing journeys. I didn’t quite understand how much of a gift it would be to get regular supervision - both on site and from faculty. So I am both deeply challenged and deeply supported. But practicum is taking a whole lot of personal energy and I’m having to be really conscious about my self care. ~ Conway Weary

After 45 hours of counseling classes to prepare for my practicum experience, the one thing that has surprised me the most about these students is their exuberance. When they come to the counselor’s room, the energy is palpable. So, one thing I’ve seen Ms. Clarke do to get them settled and ready for their guidance lesson is say, “Crisscross, applesauce.” That lets them know it’s time to sit down on the floor and get ready to listen and participate in the upcoming activity. It takes less than thirty seconds, but is a fun and effective way to harness the energy in the room. Now keeping them focused for the next 30 minutes is a conversation for another newsletter.... ~Elizabeth A. Gillespie
Practicing Perspectives

It turns out I am enjoying practicum a lot more than expected. Not that I expected it to be horrible, but I was very nervous to start off with. It’s been a little tough to try and fit all that I want to do into each week, especially with my clients only staying for a few days at the hospital, but it’s also kind of good that way - I get a variety of experiences with different patients and different issues. My supervisors are wonderful, and I think that makes a huge difference. My practicum has required me to do two days a week, and although that adds a little more craziness to my life, I really appreciate that extra time. This is a rare time that we have to be able to work in an environment and just learn, knowing that we will make mistakes and get frustrated and that’s okay.

~ Melanie Gordon-Calabrese

This month the WCU Counseling Department announced their newest faculty member, Ms. Heather Thompson. She is currently completing her doctorate in Counselor Education and Supervision at The University of Virginia. In the fall, Ms. Thompson will be Dr. Thompson, and she will be teaching COUN 605: The Helping Relationship, and COUN 686: Practicum. There is a great deal of excitement about Ms. Thompson’s arrival, and the following is an expression of her excitement to be joining the department.

When I began my pursuit for a meaningful profession in counselor education, I knew that the right job would entail working with professionals who are clearly invested in creating an educational experience for students that is enlightening and empowering. I aspired to find a program dedicated to a student-centered experience that transcends the classroom to the real-world work of dedicated counselors who serve clients, communities, and schools. Within a few hours of arriving at Western Carolina University, I recognized that an incredible opportunity existed to join a team of students, faculty, and staff who shared a similar vision to mine for a counseling program. As good fortune would have it, I received an exciting call from Dr. Lisen Roberts offering me the opportunity to join the counseling faculty at WCU. So, as the well-respected professor, Dr. Mary Deck, prepares for her new future, I prepare for mine. While it is beyond me to attempt to fill her shoes, I hope that in my own personal way I can make a meaningful contribution to the outstanding program that she and the counseling faculty and students have worked so diligently to build. I await my arrival with great anticipation and excitement, and I look forward to working with each of you!  ~ Heather Thompson
The Charlotte ACA conference recorder the highest turnout in the history of the national event. According to the ACA website, there were over 4,000 people in attendance. There have been many reports of quality and diversity in the range of subjects covered during the three day gathering.

Dr.'s Russ Curtis and Phyllis Robertson, from the Department of Human Services along with private therapist Jill Van Horne presented at the poster session of this year's American Counseling Association’s Annual Conference in Charlotte this March. Their session described the research behind a four-year implementation of a school-wide positive behavioral support (SWPBS) program at Glenn C. Marlow Elementary School in Henderson County. The study showed that the SWPBS program resulted in significant decreases in behavioral referrals by 47.8% over the four year period. OSS decreased 67% and instructional days lost decreased 56.5%.

Furthermore, the program provided school-wide consistency for behavior that positively affected students with behavioral/ emotional disorders. Academic performance improvements were also noted over the 4 years. The session received the attention of many participants at the conference from across the country.

Dr. Russ Curtis also presented on Integrated Care: An Emerging Trend in Counseling. The purpose of the presentation was to review the current literature, explain IC models of care, and discuss the skills needed to enter IC practices. The clinical mental health counseling program in the Department of Human Services has been pursuing IC placements for its practicum and internship students.

Others attending the conference included Dr. Lisen Roberts, four current graduate students of the Counseling Program, and.

A participant’s perspective:
I enjoyed the variety of opportunities available at any time. Some of these opportunities included poster sessions, workshops, presentations, ethical consultation, hiring information, and opportunities to conduct mock interviews. Presentation subjects I attended most were related to ethics, creativity, college counseling, or Brief Solution Focused Therapy. I left the conference with renewed excitement as a counselor-in-training and with the goal of presenting at next year's ACA conference in Pittsburgh. For any students thinking about attending next year's conference, I would highly recommend it. ~ Eric Pitts

Students Eric Pitts and Luella Heetderks

Conference exhibits

many graduates of the WCU program. ~ Dr. Phyllis Robertson
Here are the hand selected texts for the Summer 2009 term:


**COUN 611**: Couples Counseling - No textbook required


Congratulations to Dale Brotherton for being awarded a Legislative Award for Excellence in Teaching! Please take the time to congratulate and thank him for his commitment to quality education.
Warning: This review does contain limited spoilers, and this film is not recommended for sensitive viewers. Recently the Academy Awards bestowed 8 Oscars, including best motion picture of the year, to a stunning film that revolved around the precarious life of a poor Indian child named Jamal. The film was set in India, and many parts of it revealed the economic ebb and flow and extreme monetary stratification that individuals in that country have experienced in the past twenty years. One of the key relationships in this film was between two brothers who were both forced to support themselves after the murder of their mother. This film explored a dichotomy between the two boy’s reactions to extreme poverty. Both of the boys persistently seek different sources of security and hope. After experiencing years of struggling for basic needs such as shelter, food, and safety, Jamal’s older brother begins to seek money and power at the expense of his relative innocence. His self-serving intentions also bring great harm to his relationship with his brother and his potential for authentic relationships with others. On the other hand our primary protagonist finds his hope in a romantically persistent love of his childhood friend. It is her companionship that gives him meaning throughout the film. Both characters are clearly in different states of moral development, and even our notions of moral imperatives are stretched as some viewers may find themselves in support of a murder. In a style that has come to mark Danny Boyle’s films, he directs the film to a climactic point with stark images of both men being held in the arms of that for which they have sought. As counselors, this film may encourage us to acknowledge that some levels of desperation may cause people to adjust their normal moral standards. It can also remind us of the importance of understanding a client’s goals or perceived needs. At very least the best motion picture of the year blesses us with a poignant view of universal tragedy and hope as lived out in the Indian culture. ~Bryan Wilson