



Behavioral Health Counseling Special Issue



Behavioral Health Counseling full-time faculty members (from left to right):
Dr. Veronica Carey, Dr. Robert Chapman, Dr. Lisa Schmidt, and Dr. Ronald Comer.

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For more information about the Behavioral Health Counseling Department,
please visit drexel.edu/behavioralHealth or call Stephanie Ciabattone at 215-762-4092

Unique Summer Program Influences High School Students to Join the BHC Program



2012 Summer Academy students posing in front of the statue of Mario the Dragon.

In 2010, the Behavioral Health Counseling Department began hosting an annual Summer Academy program for high school students considering careers in behavioral healthcare. This summer, 31 students traveled from the tri-state area, as well as from South Carolina, Texas, and Florida, to come to Drexel's campus and attend the program.

During the course of the week-long academies, students learned counseling skills, interacted with guest speakers and visited the Horizon House and Gaudenzia treatment facilities. The students consistently remarked that the counseling simulation experience in particular was beneficial to them in deciding whether or not to pursue a career in behavioral healthcare. In the simulation lab, the high school students were videotaped while conducting a mock therapy session with actors pretending to be patients. One student remarked, "I loved the simulation lab because it was a good experience and not a lot of people get to do that and receive feedback." Each student received a DVD of their counseling session to take home.

On the last day of the Summer Academy Program, the students listened to a keynote address by Dr. Arthur Evans, Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual Disabilities Services Commissioner.

To accommodate for the increasing demand for these Summer Academy sessions, the Behavioral Health Counseling Department plans to hold four of the week-long academies in Summer 2013. Angela Macao, a recent graduate of Pennsauken High School in New Jersey, attended the Behavioral Health Counseling Department's Summer Academy in 2011 and has decided to attend the undergraduate program as a result of her positive Summer Academy experience. She will enter the Behavioral Health Counseling Program as a freshman this fall and looks forward to coming to Drexel.



Angela Macao, BHC '16, on vacation in Bangkok, Thailand.

I was always the friend everyone went to talk to about their problems and I was a good listener," Angela said. After seeing a poster for the Behavioral Health Counseling Summer Academy in her high school's counseling center, Angela decided that attending the week-long program would be an excellent first step in exploring the field of behavioral health services. Angela said, "I saw it as a trial and error experience. I would either find I didn't want to do this or I would find out it was right for me." Angela said that she decided to come to Drexel University for the Behavioral Health Counseling Program not only because of her Summer Academy experience, but also

because of the opportunity she will have here to complete a co-op that is tailored to her specific interests and career goals. Angela said that she decided to come to Drexel University for the Behavioral Health Counseling Program not only because of her Summer Academy experience, but also because of the opportunity she will have here to complete a co-op that is tailored to her specific interests and career goals. “You really get to go out there and experience what you want to do,” Angela said. She went on to say that she feels that she will be one step ahead of students from other programs when she graduates. Angela specifically wants to enter the Creative Arts Therapies field.

Dr. Ronald Comer: A Visionary Transforming Undergraduate Education in Behavioral Healthcare



Ronald Comer, DSW, MA, BA

While working in a locked, long-term psychiatric ward for adults in the 1970s, Dr. Ronald Comer came to the realization that any hope of helping patients recover from their illnesses was hinged on major changes occurring within systems of care. Of particular concern were his firsthand observations that he and other direct care staff lacked important areas of knowledge and skills required to work effectively with people who have serious mental illnesses.

Based on these early experiences, and after several years working as a trainer and consultant to direct care professionals in mental health care settings, Dr. Comer became devoted to effecting significant change in preparing the future behavioral health workforce by transforming the undergraduate education students receive. His vision was the development of a new kind of baccalaureate program, one that would employ a comprehensive, skills-based curriculum and provide students with the essential competencies to enter the behavioral health workforce well-prepared.

Today’s Bachelor of Science degree program in Behavioral Health Counseling (BHC), offered by the College of Nursing and Health Professions, began in 1996. More recently, the department has also added minors in Addictions Counseling and Psychiatric Rehabilitation for students in other majors who have an interest in either of these two areas. BHC’s primary objective is to develop behavioral health care pre-professionals who use evidence-based clinical skills to promote the recovery of persons with psychiatric and substance use disorders. BHC graduates are also exceptionally well-equipped to enter graduate studies in counseling, social work, and other related areas. Dr. Comer is both an associate clinical professor and the BHC Department Chair.

Evidence of Success

There is ample evidence that the Behavioral Health Counseling curriculum is hitting the mark. Graduates are highly sought-after by addiction and mental health treatment agencies because employers recognize the superior skills training students receive at the College of Nursing and Health Professions. Graduates are eagerly filling positions in partial hospitals, residential treatment facilities, clubhouse programs, and addiction treatment programs. On the job, BHC graduates consistently report that they are much better-prepared than their peers who were conventionally educated in psychology or social work.

“I have long been an advocate for improving the quality of care delivered to our most vulnerable citizens and have been dismayed that we so often fail these individuals due in part to fuzzy thinking in the initial training of

behavioral health care professionals regarding what should constitute essential competencies for professional practice,” shared Dr. Comer. He also said that, in the field as a whole, “We are still struggling to define what transdisciplinary competencies for behavioral health care practitioners should include.” Early on, Dr. Comer developed such a set of competencies to guide the Behavioral Health Counseling Department.

Forty years of progress have brought about deinstitutionalization and increased options for community living for those with a serious mental illness. Today, there is a new behavioral healthcare transformation underway. This transformation involves not where we care for people, but how we care for them. A nearly exclusive reliance on the medical model approach to treatment is giving way to rehabilitative and recovery-oriented models. “The research on the importance of making this transition is very clear,” Dr. Comer stated. “The potential for recovery from serious behavioral health disorders is improved by attending not just to the illness but to all aspects of the person: biological, psychological, and social.” The BHC Program incorporates strengths-based and recovery-oriented principles of practice throughout the curriculum.

There is a well-acknowledged crisis in workforce preparedness that threatens the progress of the current transformation happening in the field because little has changed in the way that behavioral health professionals are trained and educated. Thus, the Behavioral Health Counseling Program here at the College is providing an essential service to Philadelphia and surrounding counties by turning out a small, steady stream of graduates who are capable of providing recovery-oriented services.

In July, Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual Disabilities Services Commissioner Dr. Arthur Evans wrote to Dr. Comer and said, “I want you to know that I am very impressed with the work you are doing and want to lift it up as exactly the kind of training that our field needs. It is refreshing to know that we have a program in the city that understands the need of the public sector system and prepares people for that reality.”

Dr. Veronica Carey: At the Forefront of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Training



*Veronica Carey, PhD, CPRP
Assistant Clinical Professor and
Associate Director of the Saturday
Scholars Program*

Psychiatric rehabilitation (psych rehab) is a model that views recovery not as the absence of illness but as working within an illness. It gives individuals with mental disorder diagnoses the skills, resources and support they need to live, work, learn and socialize.

Now that psych rehab is a reimbursable modality of care, more professionals in the behavioral health field need psych rehab training. Dr. Carey, who is one of the very few psych rehab educators in the state who has been approved by the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, meets the psych rehab training needs of the Philadelphia region and beyond. “The need is great in psychiatric rehabilitation education,” she said. “The number of trained behavioral health care provider agencies is few.”

Dr. Carey additionally advocates for psych rehab on both the national and international levels. In November she will “have the ears of the world” as she

represents Drexel during her presentation in Milan, Italy at the World Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation conference.

One of Dr. Carey's goals is to make the College of Nursing and Health Professions the approved, nationally-recognized source of psych rehab training on the East Coast and to expand opportunities for Drexel to provide training both nationally and internationally. These trainings are helping to transform the residential opportunities for mental health consumers in Philadelphia. The state of Pennsylvania has the highest number of Certified Psychiatric Rehabilitation Practitioners (CPRPs) in the nation because of the number of trainings that Dr. Carey and her colleague Dr. Lisa Schmidt have conducted.

Dr. Carey says that Department Chair Dr. Ronald Comer "is a visionary and, as such, he recognizes that by offering psychiatric rehabilitation training in our curriculum at Drexel, we will essentially be able to have an impact on the core workforce throughout the greater Philadelphia region and wherever else our students may move." Very few academic institutions offer students an introduction to psychiatric rehabilitation at the undergraduate level, let alone multiple courses that take them past the surface.

Dr. Carey is an elected commissioner for the United States Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association and is charged with assuring that every state in the U.S. honors the certification process for Certified Psychiatric Rehabilitation Practitioners (CPRPs). She is also on the International Committee for the Development of Psychiatric Rehabilitation, which advocates for the use of the psychiatric rehabilitation model around the world.

Addictions Counseling and Psychiatric Rehabilitation for students in other majors who have an interest in either of these two areas. BHC's primary objective is to develop behavioral health care pre-professionals who use evidence-based clinical skills to promote the recovery of persons with psychiatric and substance use disorders. BHC graduates are also exceptionally well-equipped to enter graduate studies in counseling, social work, and other related areas. Dr. Comer is both an associate clinical professor and the BHC Department Chair.

Dr. Robert Chapman: Four Decades of Addictions Counseling Expertise



*Robert Chapman, PhD, MS Ed
Clinical Associate Professor and
Associate Director*

Dr. Robert Chapman brings 40 years of experience to his Behavioral Health Counseling faculty position as well as substance use disorder and addiction expertise. He is driven by a desire to reduce the human costs associated with high-risk alcohol consumption behaviors that are all too common among college students and young adults.

Between the late 1980s and early 2000s, a significant increase in funding alcohol-related community education, assessments and screenings emerged. During that time, Dr. Chapman began researching college students' drinking habits, focusing his efforts on qualitative research based on student interviews. His findings suggest that, in present-day collegiate life, alcohol has become a means of escape, a way to achieve social objectives, and simply an

interesting source of stories for college students to share with one another the following morning. However, the primary dilemma facing college students is that they struggle between two objectives simultaneously: getting an education as well as having a good time, which means that the pursuit of either one may compromise the acquisition of the other. Most college students find a way to balance these two objectives, but for some, the struggle is overwhelming. This is particularly the case during the first year of a college student's academic career.

Dr. Robert Chapman Continued

A largely overlooked problem on which Dr. Chapman has increasingly focused his attention is the risk presented by collegiate life to young adults who are in the early stages of recovery from alcohol and substance use disorders. An ever-increasing number of adolescents are diagnosed with substance use disorders and enter treatment while still in high school. Frequently, these students are little more than a few months “clean and sober” when they enter college. The ready availability of alcohol and other drugs on college campuses presents a particularly challenging environment for these newly-recovering students. To address this issue, Dr. Chapman mentored a recovering BHC student who completed an independent study resulting in the creation of Drexel University Recovery, or DUR. This officially-sanctioned student organization is designed to provide support for recovering students at Drexel.

Dr. Chapman is regularly invited to give guest lectures by various College of Nursing and Health Professions departments. He gives an annual guest lecture to incoming students in the Physician Assistant program, and is a regular presenter on behavior modification techniques for the Center for Integrated Nutrition & Performance’s weight management program for Drexel faculty and staff. Additionally, he has delivered a number of lectures on Motivational Interviewing to residents during their psychiatry rotation at Hahnemann Hospital.

Dr. Lisa Schmidt Holds the Nation’s First-Earned Doctorate in Psychiatric Rehabilitation



*Lisa Schmidt, PhD, CPRP
Associate Clinical Professor and
Associate Director*

Like other members of the Behavioral Health Counseling faculty, Dr Lisa Schmidt’s prior clinical experiences inform and inspire her current work as an educator. Before joining the Behavioral Health Counseling faculty, Dr. Schmidt worked in New Jersey community mental health for more than 26 years, helping people live satisfying lives despite having illnesses such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depression. As a Program Director for Bridgeway Rehabilitation Services, she developed a clubhouse program located on the grounds of a State Psychiatric Hospital. Clubhouse members cooked, cleaned, and participated in recovery group discussions in preparation for discharge from the hospital. Members also enjoyed trips into the community to ease their fears about leaving the hospital, where many of them had lived for decades. In other efforts, Dr. Schmidt worked to create

supportive housing opportunities and supervised case management services that assisted the people who moved to these residences after leaving the hospital. She also assisted families caring for a loved one with mental illness by conducting training sessions on topics such as why mental illness occurs, financial supports, and community resources. She engaged families in individual counseling consultations and facilitated skill-building sessions on communication and problem-solving strategies.

In 1999, Dr. Schmidt found herself “in the right place at the right time” when she joined the inaugural class of a new doctoral program at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey. When she was awarded her degree in 2005, Dr. Schmidt became the first person in the United States to earn a doctorate in psychiatric rehabilitation. Her dissertation was entitled *The Effects of People in Recovery as Providers*. That same year, Dr. Schmidt joined the Behavioral Health Counseling Department at the College. She explained, “I wanted to take the clinical experiences I had and apply them to helping the next generation entering the field.”

To give her students opportunities to practice skills they learn in class, Dr. Schmidt takes her Psychiatric Rehabilitation Competencies class to Project H.O.M.E., a Philadelphia-based program that works to help individuals that were previously homeless find employment. She pairs her students with a Project H.O.M.E. resident and the students conduct rehabilitation assessments that shed light on the impact of mental illness and substance abuse on homelessness and unemployment. Dr. Schmidt said, "This is a chance for our students to practice skills that they will use at their first job."

Among Dr. Schmidt's ambitions is to leave a lasting legacy in the field of psychiatric rehabilitation. As the author of many published, peer-reviewed articles and book chapters, as well as the co-editor of the book, *People in Recovery as Providers of Psychiatric Rehabilitation*, she is on her way toward reaching her goals.

Student Britt Cumens Roots for the Patient



Britt Cumens, BHC '13

As a first-year nursing student at the College in 2009, Britt Cumens found herself developing a specific interest in addictions counseling. "I decided that I wanted to pick up an addictions counseling minor," she said, "and I began to feel more and more interested in the addictions counseling courses." After meeting with her advisor and with Dr. Ronald Comer, Chair of the Behavioral Health Counseling Department, Britt made the decision to transition to the Behavioral Health Counseling Program.

Now a senior, Britt is completing a co-op at MossRehab, an outpatient rehabilitation center for individuals who have suffered traumatic brain injuries. Britt helps conduct client evaluations, administering tasks to identify clients' strengths and weaknesses and to determine their readiness to reenter the workforce. She said, "It provides me with a lot of knowledge about how people work after having a brain injury. Even though we conduct the evaluations objectively, you still want to root for them. It's incredible, personally, to see someone flourish and to see their strengths emerge after having a brain injury. You can see what good came out of the situation and it's really uplifting."

Britt's enthusiasm for behavioral health counseling has translated from the classroom to the co-op environment and back again, forming a reciprocal relationship between the two types of learning. "It's one thing to read about something, but another to actually work with a type of person," she elaborated. Britt's addictions counseling courses demanded that she fully engage with individuals in recovery. "In the introductory course, we were each required to attend at least two Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and write reactions essays. And in my psych rehab class, we were assigned residents at Project H.O.M.E. and used our interviewing skills we learned in class. We even presented assessments to the workers there and made suggestions about treatment plans."

Alumna Laura Salciunas '12 is on the Fast Track



Laura in front of the Trakai Island Castle, Lithuania.

"I always had an interest in behavioral health. I was always the 'counselor' among friends and had a genuine interest in helping people. I didn't realize I could make a career out of what came so naturally to me until I came here," said Laura Salciunas, a 2012 graduate of the Behavioral Health Counseling Program.

Laura is currently working at an outpatient methadone clinic in Camden, New Jersey as an addictions counselor and case manager. Her supervisor, who is also a Drexel Behavioral Health

Counseling alumnus, knew from his own personal experience that Laura's skills and clinical knowledge would far surpass that of candidates from other institutions. "It feels amazing to be able to use the skills I learned at Drexel there every day," Laura said.

In addition to working full-time, Laura is beginning a Master's program in Counseling and Clinical Health Psychology at the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine (PCOM) with a focus on Addictions and Offender Counseling.

In 2004, Department Chair Dr. Ronald Comer established a fast-track admissions process with the Psychology Department at PCOM. Exceptional students in Drexel's BHC undergraduate program who have maintained a competitive grade point average can request a special "fast-track" letter of recommendation from Dr. Comer. Students who receive such a letter go through an abbreviated admissions process where the application fee, GRE score submission and additional letters of recommendation are waived. Thus far, every student recommended to PCOM by Dr. Comer has been admitted. Laura Salciunas is one of these outstanding fast-track students.

In addition to her BHC course load and a co-op at a nonprofit organization that rode bicycles with women in transition from substance abuse, domestic violence or incarceration, Laura was also involved in two chorus organizations on campus and was a member of the Phi Sigma Pi National Honors Fraternity.

A Longstanding Alumni Tradition



Alumni gathered at this year's 10th annual dinner.

On June 20 2012, the Behavioral Health Counseling department hosted 40 of its alumni at its 10th Annual Alumni Dinner. Music by guest flutist Lisamarie McGrath welcomed alumni into the room as they reunited with their classmates and professors at the catered dinner.

"The Alumni Dinner is such a unique opportunity for faculty and alumni to share what is happening in the industry, as well as introduce new things that are happening in the Department of Behavioral Health Counseling," said Dr. Veronica Carey.

A Longstanding Alumni Tradition Continued

Fred Barber, this year's keynote speaker and an alumnus of the Class of 2004, talked about what it takes to thrive in the field of behavioral healthcare. He addressed the Class of 2012, providing them with strategies that applied to both their job searches and graduate school applications. He was the first to receive an official department t-shirt, which will soon be available for student purchase. During the event, alumni were invited to stand and share aspects of the BHC curriculum they use most often in their chosen professions, demonstrating that the coursework "satisfies varied behavioral health service delivery needs," Dr. Carey explained.



Keynote speaker Fred Barber received the first BHC Department official t-shirt.

In recognition of varied behavioral health system needs, the BHC department has a tradition at the annual dinner of awarding Certificates of Advanced Studies in specialty areas based upon individual students' academic performances. The specific areas in which certificates are awarded include: Individual and Group Counseling, Addictions Counseling, Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services, Child and Adolescent Support Services, Crisis Counseling Services, and Forensic Mental Health Services.

The Behavioral Health Counseling department is unique in that it is the only one within the College of Nursing and Health Professions that has held a successful annual alumni reunion for ten years running. "It provides ongoing opportunities for graduates to continue networking with each other. We're committed to developing professionalism and lifelong learning," Dr. Ronald Comer said. The department's dedication to professionalism and lifelong learning is evident not only in its curriculum but also by the way it continues to encourage alumni to network with and learn from one another years after they leave the program.

The Saturday Scholars Program: Flexible Learning for Non-traditional Students



The Saturday Scholars Program offers an alternative route to completing the Bachelor of Science degree in Behavioral Health Counseling. With classes held only on Saturdays, this accelerated, part-time option is designed to meet the needs of individuals who cannot attend the full-time program during the week due to full-time employment and family responsibilities. This option provides nontraditional students with an innovative curriculum, professional counselor preparation, access to cutting-edge Standardized Patient Lab opportunities, as well as to valuable individualized attention from knowledgeable, caring and accomplished faculty. "I'm in my second year of graduate school and I have a definite edge because of Drexel's program," reported Barb Gibbons, a 2005 alumna of the Saturday Scholars Program.

This past year, Dr. Veronica Carey has worked to ensure that the curriculum is consistent with that taught in the full-time program, and has instituted an orientation program for adjunct faculty members that teach Saturday courses. Dr. Carey also writes and edits a quarterly newsletter, *The Saturday Connection*, that connects adjunct and full-time faculty members. Regular columns include Dr. Ron Comer's "Comer's Corner" and Dr. Robert Chapman's "Chapman's Chatter."

Dr. Carey additionally established a built-in lunchtime continuing education series, called Learn Academy, where students can earn certificates in areas outside of the BHC curriculum in areas such as APA writing style, interviewing skills, careers in the behavioral healthcare, and graduate programs. Students register to attend during their hour-long lunch break on Saturdays to complete that week's Learn Academy. Each session is taught by someone who specializes in the topic at hand.

The Saturday Scholars Program is very proud of its excellent adjunct teaching staff, most of whom are currently practicing behavioral health care specialists. Several of the part-time instructional staff have been working with the Behavioral Health Counseling Program for more than a decade. One of the very first faculty members, Kevin Drab, was the Director of Clinical Services for a large addictions treatment center before joining the faculty as a full-time assistant clinical professor. He has since become the senior part-time faculty member after returning to private practice. William Holt, who has taught Forensic Mental Health Services and other counseling classes in the program for 15 years, also has a long history of professional roles within the Philadelphia region. He is currently the Director of all of Philadelphia's behavioral health services provided by Horizon House, Inc. Another long-serving faculty veteran is Stephen Ridley, who teaches Multicultural Counseling and who has been a leader in addictions treatment program initiatives throughout Philadelphia. He is currently the Manager of Collegiate and Behavioral Health Training for the District 1199c Training and Upgrading Fund and was formerly the Regional Director of Northwestern Human Services in Philadelphia. These three longtime contributors to the BHC Department are joined by many other adjunct faculty members who each boast excellent resumes documenting the years of experience that they bring into the classroom for the benefit of the part-time students.

Looking Ahead: Pioneering Undergraduate Education in Geriatric Mental Healthcare

The Behavioral Health Counseling department has a roster of accomplished faculty members, a rigorous and comprehensive curriculum, offerings for nontraditional students, and a creative program for engaging prospective students. However, even with so much to offer, the department never ceases to innovate and pursue new ways to grow. One of these growth opportunities will occur during the 2012-2013 academic year, when the department offers its first special topics course on the subject of geriatric behavioral health care.

During the next two decades, the population of adults over age 65 is expected to nearly double in size. With the health status of roughly 1 in 5 older adults compromised by a mental health or substance use disorder, the need for behavioral health care professionals with knowledge in the area of geriatric care will increase significantly. "There is an alarming lack of basic competence and core knowledge in key areas pertaining to the treatment challenges posed by this growing population," BHC Department Chair Dr. Ronald Comer said. His remarks are reinforced by a July 10, 2012 Institute of Medicine report entitled, "The Mental Health and Substance Use Workforce for Older Adults: In Whose Hands?"

Students who enroll in the department's new course, "Geriatric Behavioral Health Care," will learn about the latest research on the biopsychosocial aging process, later-life pathologies, essential principles of optimal care, and best practices for assessing and treating major psychiatric and substance use disorders in this population. The new course was offered as an elective in Spring 2013.