Survey of Graduates from the University of Maine at Augusta’s

Mental Health and Human Services Program

Descriptive Results

2019

In June of 2019 the Mental Health and Human Services program in conjunction with the Office of Institutional Research and the UMA Alumni Association conducted a survey of recent graduates of the program.

**Goals of the study**

Periodically, it is essential for the program to survey graduates to determine the efficacy of the program and to monitor various changes in the structure and curriculum we offer. Additionally, it is useful to gain information to enlighten our opinions and understanding of our graduates. This survey focused on four major program considerations:

**Employment:** A primary goal of the program has always been workforce development. Hence one of our first goals has always been centered around employment. As a professionally oriented program, we have always strived to make sure students graduate with the skills needed to gain and keep employment. However, we have never guaranteed employment upon graduation, rather that students will have the skills needed to obtain and maintain successful employment.

**Skill development:** Since the last survey in 2013, there have been many changes within the program and the university. We had established a clear set of program goals and the university had moved forward with changes in the core and general education focus. Borrowing from a prior alumni survey conducted by Amherst College ( https://www.amherst.edu/alumni/survey ) (2013), we considered examining how well the students’ education prepared them in terms of specific skills or attributes within the workplace environs. In this survey we considered both programmatic goals as well as applicable core and general education ones.

**Furthering education:** As it is becoming increasingly clear, post-bachelorette education is often a prerequisite for advancement in the human services field. As the program has developed, we have learned that many of our students have pursed higher education. Getting a sense of the magnitude of this development may be important in changing the curriculum to meet this expanding goal.

**Connecting to UMA and the alumni association:** With all the changes with the MHRT/C in the past several years, it is increasingly important for our student, particularly those not actively employed at the present time stay, abreast of these changes The idea that the program should provide an informational resource for our graduates is a direction for further develop. How alumni connect and use the University as a continuing resource will be important in planning such an undertaking.

**Methodology**

After obtaining approval from the UMA Institutional Review Board, the Office of Institutional Research sent an introductory email and a link to the Survey Monkey survey to 1261. The list of e-mail addresses was obtained from the UMA Alumni Association. The survey was sent out on June 22nd with three follow up prompts on June 28th, and July 6th and 12th, with survey officially closing on the 13th.

**Return Rate**: Of the 1261 emails sent, 47 (2.9%) were returned as undeliverable. Of the remaining 1254, (77.4%) had not been opened at the close of the survey. Of those opened, 157 individuals responded, yielding a return rate of 49.5%.

While the actual return rate for the opened emails was quite good, the fact that well over 70% of the emails were unopened was very disappointing. One possible explanation for this was that for many students, as they transitioned into alumni were still using their university email addresses. University policy requires biannual changes to the password to remain active. Failure to do so will inactivate your account. Additionally, the University has established a policy limiting the use of student email accounts to only for five years after graduation. If a student did not change their email addresses to a non-University one, the email was sent to the original university email address. This may explain a portion of the unopened surveys.

**Results**

**Employment and impact of UMA degree on employment**: Of those responding to the survey, 90% reported currently employed, with the vast majority, 70%, employed in the mental health or human services field. For those employed in the field the table below indicates that

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| **Area of Employment** | **Percentage**  **(Reflects more than 100%)** |
| **Mental Health Community Based Services** | 25.6 |
| **Mental Health Residential Based Services** | 9.0 |
| **State Government** | 10.74 |
| **Substance Abused Community Based Services** | 5.26 |
| **Substance Abuse Residential Services** | 4.96 |
| **Educational Services** | 20.6 |
| **Child Based Services** | 24.79 |
| **Adult Based Services** | 23.97 |
| **Services for Developmentally Disabled** | 16.53 |

When students were asked how well did your coursework prepare you for this position? 5.4% less than adequate or poorly while 45.9 reported that they felt their course work prepared them for their current position. To delve somewhat deeper, alumni were asked in what ways did your UMA Mental Health and Human Services degree contribute to your career? Results presented in the table below suggest that the degree did a great deal to improve their position (improved evaluations, added responsibilities and salary increases) but did not substantially improve their status (promotion) within the employment setting

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| **Ways in which you MHHS degree has contributed to your career** | **Percentage**  **(Reflects more than 100%)** |
| Helped get better evaluations | 38% |
| Helped get added responsibilities | 60% |
| Helped get a salary increase | 53% |
| Helped get a promotion | 30% |
| Helped get access to graduate school | 41% |

**Skill Development**: Obviously, a goal of any University is to provide a useful and practical education for its students. To assess the usefulness of their education, graduates were asked how well their UMA education prepared them for various activities within the work/community setting.

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| **Program Goals**  **Performance Area** | **Percentage** | | |
| **Poor/Less**  **than adequate** | **Adequate** | **Very Well/ More than adequate** |
| Working effectively as a team member | 7% | 46% | 47% |
| Relating well with individuals of differing backgrounds | 6% | 37% | 57% |
| Practicing in accordance with professional ethical standards | 3% | 33% | 64% |
| Conducting interviews and counseling with diverse populations | 9% | 43% | 48% |
| Collecting and integrating information for various interventions | 7% | 48% | 45% |
| Effectively performing case management services | 13% | 41% | 46% |
| Effectively performing crisis services | 15% | 44% | 41% |

These performance areas were derived from the Mental Health and Human Services program’s goals. Certainly, it appears that many of our graduates found that our program prepared them more than adequately and or very well in the areas of relating well with individuals of differing backgrounds and practicing in accordance with professional ethical standards.

While mildly concerning, but certainly understandable, students reported least prepared for situations involving direct case management or crisis services. While these courses are required it is often difficult to translate real world challenges and vicissitudes into an academic setting. Given the intended variability in the internship experience, it is possible that some students would have only a limited exposure to these types of challenges. The program will need to consider if these areas need to be a greater focus and expectation at the internship level

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| **General Education**  **Performance Area** | **Percentage** | | |
| **Poor/Less**  **than adequate** | **Adequate** | **Very Well/ More than adequate** |
| Writing clearly and effectively | 5% | 38% | 57% |
| Communicating well orally | 5% | 44% | 51% |
| Effectively using problem-solving skills to address challenges | 7% | 42% | 51% |
| Understanding how various societal factors impact your professional life | 8% | 35% | 57% |
| Developing well-reasoned arguments | 12% | 36% | 52% |
| Effectively obtaining new information using various technologies | 11% | 46% | 43% |

In terms of the general education goals for the UMA, the majority of our graduates believed that they received more than adequate preparations in the areas of writing effectively, social awareness, logical thinking, problem-solving and communicating well. The only area in which students only felt adequately prepared was in the use of technologies for obtaining new information. Essentially, it seems that students believed that their education prepared them adequately for their future employment.

**Pursuing further education**: Based on the sample, 35% of the graduates have earned a master’s degree and 5.8% have received their doctorate primarily in the field of mental health and or human services. Another 53% are pursing such a degree.

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| **Further Education** | |
| Pursuing a Baccalaureate Degree | 16.18% |
| Pursuing a Master's Degree | 52.94% |
| Pursuing a Doctoral Degree | 8.82% |
| Earned a Baccalaureate Degree | 13.24% |
| Earned a Master's Degree | 35.29% |
| Earned a Doctoral Degree | 5.88% |

These numbers would be impressive for any undergraduate institution. More than 80% of our responding graduates are or have pursed higher education. Typically, we do not view ourselves as a major pathway for graduate education. Seems like we should

**Connecting to UMA and Mental Health and Human Services** The final survey focus was communication. Our graduates were asked how they connect with UMA?

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| **Connecting with UMA** | |
| Facebook | 48.8 |
| UMA Webpage | 41.6 |
| Alumni Gatherings | 6.4 |
| Other | 24.0 |

Most seem to connect well with UMA’s electronic and social media presence but that does not translate into event attendance. This would suggest that it will be essential for the alumni association to develop a more effective and personal way in communicating with students.

With all the recent changes to both the overall UMA webpage and our program’s content, it was important to assess the extent of use by our graduates. As the mental health and human services field changes, it will be important to provide our graduates more specific information about changes to certification regulations and the availability of continuing education opportunities. The UMA/program webpage will be able to offer a credible and reliable source of information. The important part is to make sure it is used.

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| **Have used the UMA Mental Health and**  **Human Services webpage** | |
| Yes | 17.5% |
| No | 82.5% |

Certainly, this suggests that, as a program, we have a long way to go. It may be possible to have links off the Facebook page directing student to the Mental Health and Human Services webpage routinely as well as guiding them there when there is new career information posted.

**Discussion**

When these results are considered in light of the goals of the survey, the picture that emerges is very encouraging. The vast majority of our graduates are currently employed, most in their field of study. They look upon their education as beneficial and useful in obtaining and advancing their first professional job. For this group of respondents, they have made the connection that further education will translate into real job advancement.

Our graduates are doing their part to fulfill the state-wide needs for mental health and human services practioners. By educating place-bound students, we have been able to increase the number of skilled professional human services workers in various parts of the state. Many areas that would not draw professionals from out of state.

In conclusion, a more in-depth analysis of these results is warranted. The first question would be does sample accurately reflect our graduates. The fact that the majority of emails sent remained unopened is concerning. Sharing these results with the alumni association and UMA marketing will hopefully improve the program’s ability to connect with our graduates.