

[00:02] Emily: Hi, my name is Emily Vecchiarelli, I am the Assistant Director of Graduate Programs here at Suffolk University's College of Arts and Sciences and joining me here today is Professor David Shumaker and he is going to speaking with you a little bit more about the accelerated bachelors and master's degree program in mental health counseling.

[00:24] David: Thanks Emily. Happy to be here, thank you to the people that are going to be viewing this for your interest in our program.

[00:28] We're excited about the accelerated program and certainly want to share with you all the information that we can share, if it's not fully fleshed out in this video please don't hesitate to reach out to me and Emily and Scott Carlson of Grad Admissions.

[00:45] In terms of myself I'm the program director, I've been the program director for seven years, I am a professor here in the department of psychology. I'm also a licensed Psychologist. I have been licensed for close to 17 years.

[1:00] I think about now I and have a small private practice that compliments my work here at the University. Within a program I teach, Internship, Practicum, group supervision sections as well as interpersonal skills with is kind of an intro to counseling skills course in the fall semester.

[1:18] I also teach professional orientation in the spring semester. So, if you join the program in the first full year, you'll likely have a lot of contact with me. That's probably all I want to say about myself at this point.

[01:40] Emily: Thank you David. Let's talk a little bit more about our department.

[01:46] David: Sure. So, the accelerated program is kind of designed to move you forward in pursuing a master's degree in mental health counseling. This degree offers a lot of flexibility and good career opportunities, within the state of Massachusetts especially as it qualifies you to sit for the licensing examination as a licensed mental health counselor in Massachusetts. So, it is a 60-credit two-year program full-time

[02:20] David: and in terms of the nuts and bolts we can talk about it some more as we move forward but in general, you would be taking two courses your senior year which would apply both undergraduate and our program

[02:37] And then you would do two more full time years on campus here in our master's program. Upon completion of that degree, you can sit for the licensing examination in Massachusetts

[02:50] There are two more years of supervised clinical work post-degree that would be required for you to actually get your license that would be typical in any mental health degree be that a psychologist, social worker, or in this case a licensed mental health counselor.

[3:07] Typically there is some post-degree supervised hours before you would be able to receive that licensure

[03:18] Emily: Alright. We have some wonderful faculty that teach in the mental health counseling program. David if you want to talk through who these folks might be interacting with.

[03:29] David: Sure yeah. I think that this would definitely be a strength of the program from my humble opinion. We have a core group of four of us and in terms of longevity of who's been here,

[03:44] Dr. Medoff, he is an associate professor in our program he was the program director preceded me for over a decade and he teaches courses in psychological diagnosis and some of the clinical practicum.

[04:03] He is a very talented clinician that's internationally renowned in some of his interests in the field of forensic psychology.

[04:09] Then we have Dr. John Smolinsky who's been here several years now as our clinical training coordinator. And so, he teaches several of our courses, he's a very talented teacher and has previously worked at the Veterans Administration and has maintained a real effort to promote our students

[04:34] in securing and maintaining their internship sites in the second year. He is a great resource for students concerning that and is very well connected with the sites.

[04:49] Dr. Mary Beth Medvide is our most recent addition to our faculty, she is an assistant professor and is a wonderful teacher and was awarded a couple of years ago or maybe last year the teacher of the year award from the graduate student association.

[05:10] so she is marvelously talented in that area, students love her, and she will teach a lot of your introductory courses as well. Lifespan development, developmental psychopathology, so you'll have a lot of contact with her as well.

[05:24] Emily: Okay, thanks David for that. So now we're going to go talk about the philosophies that govern the mental health program. David, do you want to run through those in a general sense?

[05:33] David: Yeah. I think we certainly are bringing an eclectic perspective to the training of our mental health counselor students. And by saying that we certainly are an evidence-based program where we look for research for good clinical practice

[05:56] And we will give you exposure to those kinds of theoretical orientations and techniques that will certainly be grounded in science and backed up by research

[06:08] But we also allow students the flexibility to explore what remains most authentic to them and their personality. While simultaneously listening to the client and taking a collaborative approach to treatment

[06:23] We believe that it's a privilege to be a helper and wish to promote awe in our students about what a wonderful opportunity this is to ourselves to collaborate with clients and work with them

[06:41] So we seek students that are very open to the process of learning and have bright minds and open hearts and we believe that while technique is important, and you will learn that in our program

[06:53] the most critical thing is being able to foster a good client-therapist relationship, promoting alliance, that tends to predict outcomes the most, the best outcome measures in terms of effective treatment

[07:08] and so we'll ground you in the core micro skills of counseling that from there you can develop your own theoretical orientation and grow from there.

[07:22] Emily: Wonderful, thanks David. So, we've spoken a little bit about faculty and philosophies in the program, let's talk a little more about the student experience. So, how many students are in our mental health counseling program?

[07:31] David: That's a great question. We have a program that contains a typical cohort of 20 students. That is our target goal and consistently over the past few years that has been our incoming cohort.

[07:47] There's a lot of advantages to that. Of the incoming group being able to foster connections within the incoming cohort.

[08:01] So in that respect it is a cohort model, when you come in if you are one of the 20 students you will be taking all of your classes together, with the exception of the practicum course where it's broken up into 2 sections

[08:15] and so you'll have half of your incoming cohort working with you. You get an opportunity to foster good connections and we get an opportunity to meet you and get to know you a lot better.

[08:25] there are certainly programs that are bigger than ours and they may have advantages such as the amount of elective they are able to offer for example

[08:34] but, in terms of faculty and getting to know your peers it's a pretty cool model in terms of keeping the classroom intimate and forming a sense of cohesion in the relatively brief time that you're here

[08:49] Emily: Sure yeah. And you've thrown this word around a little bit, so what is a cohort model and is that what our program is?

[08:58] David: Yeah. It is in that respect in the sense that when a student comes onto campus, they have the option to do a lot of mix and matching and as I was saying earlier, as it is a two-year program

[09:21] when you come in you will be slotted into classes with all of the same 19 other students that have been admitted for that incoming year, so you get to stay with them in lockstep

[09:39] and that fosters a lot of connections and support during a very busy couple years.

[09:47] Emily: And I would imagine that that builds a great community of graduate students to work together

[09:50] David: It does. Our students stay together and keep in touch post-graduation. Some alumni come and sit in on our courses and talk about what they're doing career wise and preparing for the licensing exam

[10:12] and so there is that spirit of connection that extends beyond two years that students are here

[10:22] Emily: So, we've touched on this a little bit but what exactly makes the mental health counseling accelerated degree different from our standard mental health counseling program?

[10:32] Yeah. I'd say the primary advantage is an early introduction to the program for those in undergrad that by their junior year in college have a pretty clear sense that they want this master's degree.

[10:53] While it does not reduce the overall time needed for completion of the degree, you still need two full academic calendar years following what would be your graduation from undergrad

[11:03] It allows you to have a taste of the program and meet the faculty in your senior year where you will take two courses, one each semester

[11:19] and so, you can have exposure not only to our classwork and faculty, but you may also feel a leg up should you want to pursue a practicum placement outside of campus in your first year

[11:32] and already be connected with Dr. Smolinsky as you'll likely take his counseling theory class, you can talk to him about that option.

[11:44] also in terms of cost savings, being able to apply two courses to both undergraduate and graduate credit. So, there are financial benefits as well as integrating yourself into the program sooner rather than during the typical fashion.

[12:04] Emily: and we've already touched on this a little bit just a few more questions. Why might you choose to do this? Why apply during your undergraduate or junior year?

[12:17] David: I think if you know pretty clearly that this would be where you want to head kind of post-graduate for further schooling or training, I think it can make sense to have that exposure for the reasons I outlined previously

[12:36] starting to feel a little more integrated, you can certainly be maintaining your undergraduate experiences and connections but also starting to get to know the faculty in our department

[12:47] And get some exposure to coursework that may seem more aligned to your interests rather than take more undergraduate courses that may not be of specific interest to you.

[13:01] a really good barometer for whether a field is right for us is how interesting is the curriculum if you're finding several courses of curriculum that really excite you then that's an indicator of good fit

[13:16] Taking counseling theory in the fall taking family therapy or professional orientation in the spring. Those hopefully would be exciting opportunities for you to have exposure too

[13:37] certainly if do not feel like you are ready to make that commitment you can always apply at the end of your senior year as a regularly admitted student. If you already know that you want to do it, it may be to your advantage

[13:47] Emily: Sort of dipping your toes in the water. So, we have also mentioned this a little bit, how long does it take to complete the accelerated mental health counseling degree and what semester do students begin that

[14:05] Yes. So, the first piece is that you should still anticipate the equivalent of four years of undergrad experience and in your senior year you will be taking two courses where your kind of dipping your toe

[14:43] into the pool, and then two more years equivalent to full time graduate experience in our program. You take probably one course less as you've already taken two courses in two of those semesters

[14:57] but from start to finish when you begin undergrad to when you graduate with your dual degree, it will be a six year experience

[15:09] So in terms of the second question of “what semester do students begin the accelerated mental health counseling program” the first exposure is in the fall semester of your senior year

[15:22] and then you take one course the fall semester of your senior year and one course the spring semester of your senior year, then that following fall you come on campus and instead of taking

[15:35] 5 courses like the other incoming students who were not doing accelerated program, you'd take only 4 but then you are locked in full time exclusively doing masters level work

[15:50] Emily: And now let's get into a little bit more application specific questions. How do I apply for the mental health counseling program, specifically the accelerated degree?

[16:02] David: As the PowerPoint is indicating the first thing to do is receive a nomination from a full-time faculty member in the psychology department. So, it's critical to be thinking about fostering connections with teachers and supervisors within the department

[16:19] and identify by sophomore hopefully by junior year who you want to approach to seek a nomination. There is a nomination form that an individual would need to fill out that can serve as a recommendation as well

[16:33] and once we have that in place, then graduate admissions will open an application and there are certain minimal GPA requirements and prior course work requirements to be eligible and we could certainly go into more detail to be helpful

[16:56] once you complete the application itself, then there will be an interview with myself to look at readiness and goodness of fit and certainly we would encourage students to get the application complete by the start of the second semester

[17:15] Which is typically when we are doing all of our admissions process and certainly there have been times where that coming in later in your second semester of junior year have been considered in the past

[17:28] Emily: Great, thank you. And am I correct in saying that this program is for our psychology majors only and that folks in other majors may not be the best suited for the accelerated program specifically.

[17:34] David: Yes, thank you for mentioning that. This is for psychology undergraduate majors.

[17:50] Emily: Okay, so, how competitive is the application process for the mental health counseling program specifically for the accelerated degree, and then of course you can speak a little bit about the regular application if you'd like as well, David.

[18:01] David: Yes, so both are competitive in that we receive many more applications than we extend offers to. Beyond that, there is certainly some fluctuation from year to year, in terms of the actual numbers

[18:23] which I don't know we need to get into those, that's not meant to discourage somebody pursuing a nomination and an application, but some degree of confidence that this is a strong program, which we believe is

[18:41] Emily: when should students plan to apply, we spoke about this a little already, but when is the best time for students to apply for this program

[18:51] David: Optimal would be identifying and seeking nominations from full time faculty in the department by at least the end of the first semester so we can start the process of opening the application and completing it

[19:11] hopefully by the start of the second semester. For students regularly matriculating into the program the application deadline is February first so to keep that as a general target date is preferred

[19:33] We have a little more flexibility with the accelerated program because some juniors its dawning on them a little bit during the second semester that they want to pursue this

[19:46] there is a little bit of a point of no return in the second semester where it becomes too late and we're heading into the summer and may not be able to process it

[19:54] Emily: so that leads us to our follow up question to that which is if a student is not admitted to the accelerated program for any reason, can they apply for regular admission?

[20:04] David: sure. If somebody has been unsure about whether they are ready to make a commitment or not during their junior year or are less aware of this opportunity, we have had several Suffolk undergraduate students join our master's program just the "traditional" avenue of entry.

[20:31] after they complete their senior year. That application process would begin your senior year preferably by February first which is our first application deadline of your senior year.

[20:48] Emily: And who should folks work with and contact when they start to consider the accelerated program. Throughout their application process, who are the best points of contact?

[21:02] David: I think what you have on the PowerPoint is good. First your academic advisor is good to go to about the program itself and your eligibility for it and you can certainly talk to me

[12:20] I have sat with many undergraduates and talked about our program before, always happy to do that, other full-time faculty in terms of not only learning about the program and field but also potentially seeking a nomination

[21:36] Graduate admissions office, they're wonderful people that are certainly devoted to providing information and certainly the dean's office, people like yourself Emily are wonderful ambassadors of our program.

[21:53] Emily: Thanks. So that concludes this PowerPoint there are some helpful links on this slide, but they can be provided to you, either Professor Shumaker can send you these links or

[22:07] Emily: or our graduate admissions office or myself, please go visit the accelerate bachelors' master's website, it has a little bit more information about the specific GPA requirements of the application

[22:22] as well as an outline of what to expect but we thank you once again for listening to this PowerPoint and Professor Shumaker thank you so much for taking the time to make this PowerPoint for students considering the program. Thank you again

[22:36] David: Thank you, Emily