



COUNSELING PROGRAM

Program Assessment Plan

**Clinical Mental Health
Counseling**

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Introduction

Northwestern College is home to the Clinical Mental Health Counseling Masters of Art degree program. The program resides in the Counseling Department which was established as a department in 2022. The department consists of 3 core faculty and a number of adjunct faculty.

All classes are taught online with both asynchronous and synchronous components. All clinical courses are taught in a fully synchronous manner. Beginning summer 2026 all students will meet face-to-face with faculty each summer session.

Counseling Program Mission



The Model: Counselor as the Hands and Feet of Jesus

Counseling Program Mission Statement: The Counseling Program at Northwestern College is a Christ-centered community dedicated to the development of outstanding counselors who are called to serve both Christ and in diverse, multicultural, and global society with marginalized populations. Students integrate a biblical perspective with culturally sensitive and ethical clinical skills so they can courageously and faithfully provide compassionate care in pursuing God's work of restoration and healing in the world.

Evaluation of Program Learning Objectives

The 2024 CACREP Standards for accredited programs to have a Comprehensive Evaluation Plan to continuously and systematically evaluate and improve program achievement on an annual basis. Standard 2.D reads:

2.D. CONTINUOUS AND SYSTEMATIC IMPROVEMENT OF THE PROGRAM

The counselor education program has a written comprehensive evaluation plan for systematically evaluating, monitoring, and reporting achievement of program objectives on an annual basis. The plan includes:

- 1. academic quality indicators aligned with program objectives;*
- 2. minimum thresholds for academic quality indicators, as determined by counselor education program faculty;*
- 3. the data that will be collected;*
- 4. a procedure for how and when data will be collected;*
- 5. a method for how and when data will be reviewed or analyzed;*
- 6. a process for addressing unmet minimum thresholds;*
- 7. a procedure for identifying and analyzing trends in the data across multiple years;*
- and*
- 8. an explanation for how data will be used for curriculum and program improvement.*

The following narrative outlines the NWC CMHC Program Comprehensive Assessment Plan and addresses each of the components called for in Standard 2.D.

Data Collection Procedure

The following table is a list of the data that is collected to evaluate Program Learning Objectives at all levels of evaluation along with the collection schedule, procedures for collecting data, and the location of data after collection.

Table 1. Data Collection

Data Collected	When Data is Collected and Used	Procedure for Collecting Data	Where Data is Kept	When Shared with Student
KPI Assignments	During specified courses for student assessment, Data pulled annually for analysis at faculty retreat	Rubrics in BB, Program Director and GPS Curriculum Instructor “mine” data	Data stored in BB and in Departmental One Drive	If grade falls below C, a Professional Concern Form is completed by instructor and the Formal Remediation Process takes place which is overseen by the Student Support and Remediation Committee.
CPCE Scores (Content Score; All students)	Each semester CPCE taken, Data pulled annually for analysis at faculty retreat	CPCE website via secure login, Program Director collects	Program Director; CPCE database	Program Director lets student know if pass or fail via email.
Formal Assessment: Competency Review utilizing the PCPE	<i>(Professional Skills & Dispositions Section)</i> COUN 505 Professional Orientation (All Sections) COUN 530 Group Counseling COUN 605 Pre-Practicum CMHC 615 Internship I,	Completed at faculty meetings	Confidential Student Files	Letter emailed to each student on the outcome.

	Data pulled annually for analysis at faculty retreat			
Supervisor Evaluation of Students	Midterm and end of all practicum and internships, Data pulled annually for analysis at faculty retreat	CCS-R sent to Supervisor via Tevera; available to supervisor, faculty, and Clinical Coordinator; Clinical Coordinator creates report	In Tevera	End of semester meeting in practicum and internships
Student Evaluations of Supervisors	Midterm and end of all practicum and internships, Data pulled annually for analysis at faculty retreat	Eval available to students in Tevera, available to supervisor, faculty, and Clinical Coordinator; Clinical Coordinator creates report	In Tevera	End of semester meeting in practicum and internships
Graduate Survey	6 months after graduation, Data pulled annually for analysis at faculty retreat	Survey emailed, completed via Qualtrics	In Qualtrics, and with Program Director	NA
Alumni/Employers/Community Partners Survey	Annually, Data pulled annually for analysis at faculty retreat	Survey emailed, completed via Qualtrics	In Qualtrics, and with Program Director	NA

Program Goals

The overarching goal of the NWC CMHC program is to prepare culturally competent, knowledgeable, and skilled counselors for Clinical Mental Health applications. These goals are met by completing the Program Learning Objectives (PLO) and the Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) listed in the following section.

Table 2. Program Learning Objectives, Key Performance Indicators, and Benchmarks

PLO #		CACREP Standard	KPI	Benchmark
1.	Professional Counseling Students are able to proficiently practice the required professional dispositions to become effective counselors.	2.C	<p>COUN 605 Pre-Practicum: Recording 5: Session 5 + paperwork- CCS-R (I)</p> <p>CMHC 620 Internship II: End of Semester Paperwork – CCS-R (Site Supervisor) (R)</p> <p>Alumni/Employer/Business Partner Survey (A)</p>	<p>80% of students score 44/55 on Part 2. Counseling Dispositions & Behaviors of the CCS-R</p> <p>80% of students score 44/55 on Part 2. Counseling Dispositions & Behaviors of the CCS-R</p> <p>75% of respondents rate program at 4/5 on competencies of preparation for skills, knowledge, and counseling dispositions.</p>
2.	Professional Counseling Students acquire the ability to understand the role of religion and spirituality and how a Christian/Biblical world view can be integrated in client's' and counselors' psychological functioning.	3.B.11	<p>COUN 550 Classic Theories of Counseling: Personal Model of Counseling Paper and Video (I)</p> <p>COUN 580 Career Development & Counseling: Career Counseling & Spiritual Integration Paper (R)</p>	<p>80% of students will score 85 or better on the project rubric</p> <p>80% of students will score 85 or better on the project rubric</p>

			COUN 530 Group Counseling and Group Work: Group Process & Spiritual Integration Paper (A)	80% of students will score 85 or better on the project rubric
3.	The CMHC Program engages with community partners to solicit and utilize feedback to continually improve the program.	2.F.1., 2., 3., 4.	CMHC 610 Practicum: Consultation between Faculty Supervisor and Site Supervisor (I) CMHC 615 Internship I: Consultation between Faculty Supervisor and Site Supervisor (R) Survey of Alumni/Employers/Community Partners (A)	Satisfactory progression on Consultation Form Satisfactory progression on Consultation Form 75% of respondents rate program at 4/5 on competencies of preparation for skills, knowledge, and counseling dispositions.

Table 3. Student Learning Outcomes, Key Performance Indicators, and Benchmarks

SLO #			CACREP Standard	KPI	Benchmark
1.		Professional Counseling Students acquire proficient knowledge, skills, and dispositions in Clinical Mental Health Counseling demonstrating preparedness to enter the field.	3.A-H 5.C.4		
a.		<i>Professional Counseling Orientation and Ethical Practice:</i> Professional Counseling Students understand ethical standards of professional counseling organizations and credentialing bodies, and applications of ethical and legal considerations in professional counseling across service delivery modalities and specialized practice areas.	3.A.10	<p>COUN 515 Ethics: Values & Ethics When Dealing with Difficult Situations Research Paper (I)</p> <p>CMHC 570 Addictions: Addiction Podcast Series Episode #3 Group Project (R)</p> <p>CMHC 620 Internship II: End of semester paperwork – CCS-R (Site Supervisor) (A)</p>	<p>80% of students will score 85 or better on the project rubric</p> <p>80% of students will score 85 or better on the project rubric</p> <p>80% of students score 44/55 on Part 2. Counseling Dispositions & Behaviors of the CCS-R</p>
b.		<i>Social and Cultural Identities and Experiences:</i> Professional Counseling Students Understand the influence of heritage, cultural identities, attitudes, values, beliefs, understandings, within-group differences, and acculturative experiences on help-seeking and coping behaviors.	3.B.3	<p>COUN 520 Social & Cultural Experiences – Culture Immersion Experience Paper (I)</p> <p>CMHC 520 Diagnostic Processes: Diversity in Mental Illness Group Presentation (R)</p> <p>CPCE Social & Cultural Diversity subscale (A)</p>	<p>80% of students score 85 or better on the project rubric</p> <p>80% of students will score 85 or better on the project rubric</p> <p>80% of students score within one standard</p>

					deviation of national mean
c		<i>Lifespan Development:</i> Professional Counseling Students integrate an understanding of biological, neurological, and physiological factors that affect lifespan development, functioning, behavior, resilience, and overall wellness.	3.C.10	COUN 525 Counseling Across the Lifespan: Theory Meets Therapy Project (I) CMHC 575 Psychopharmacology & Neuroscience - Case Study # 3 Theresa & Paper (R) CPCE Human Growth & Development Subscale (A)	80% of students will score 85 or better on the project rubric 80% of students will score 85 or better on the project rubric 80% of students score within 1 standard deviation of national mean
d		<i>Career Development:</i> Professional Counseling Students determine approaches for conceptualizing the interrelationships among and between work, socioeconomic standing, wellness, disability, trauma, relationships, and other life roles and factors.	3.D.2	COUN 551 Theories of Counseling - Group Project: Determine Approaches Presentation (I) COUN 580 Career Development & Counseling: Career Development Program Presentation (R) CPCE Career Development Subscale (A)	80% of students will score 85 or better on the project rubric 80% of students will score 85 or better on the project rubric 80% of students score within 1 standard deviation of national mean
e		<i>Counseling Practice and Relationships:</i> Professional Counseling Students employ interviewing, attending, and listening skills in the counseling process.	3.E.9	COUN 605 Pre-Practicum: Recording 6: Session 6 + paperwork (I)	80% of students score 45/60 on Part 1: Counseling Skills and Therapeutic Conditions of the CCS-R

				CMHC 615 Internship I: Midterm Paperwork – CCS-R (Site Supervisor) (R) CMHC 620 Internship II: End of Semester Paperwork – CCS-R (Site Supervisor) (A)	80% of students score 45/60 on Part 1: Counseling Skills and Therapeutic Conditions of the CCS-R 80% of students score 45/60 on Part 1: Counseling Skills and Therapeutic Conditions of the CCS-R
f		<i>Group Counseling and Group Work:</i> Professional Counseling Students demonstrate characteristics and functions of effective group leaders.	3.F.4	COUN 530 Group Counseling and Group Work: Buechner Process Group Reflection Paper #1 (I) CMHC 615 Internship I: Case Conceptualization (R) CPCE Group Work subscale (A)	80% of students will score 85 or better on the project rubric 80% of students will score 85 or better on the project rubric 80% of students score within 1 standard deviation of national mean
g		<i>Assessment and Diagnostic Processes:</i> Professional Counseling Students utilize assessments relevant to academic/educational, career, personal, and social development.	3.G.8	COUN 510 Assessment and Diagnostic Processes: Case Study Report (I) COUN 580 Career Development & Counseling: Career Assessment Paper (R)	80% of students will score 85 or better on the project rubric 80% of students will score 85 or better on the project rubric

				CPCE Assessment and Diagnostic Processes Subscale (A)	80% of students score within 1 standard deviation of national mean
h		<i>Research and Program Evaluation:</i> Professional Counseling Students assess research methods and procedures to evaluate counseling interventions.	3.H.7	COUN 510 Assessment & Appraisal: Dyad/Triad Presentation (I) COUN 585 Research & Program Evaluation: Program Evaluation Paper (R) CPCE Research & Program Evaluation Subscale (A)	80% of students will score 85 or better on the project rubric 80% of students will score 85 or better on the project rubric 80% of students score within 1 standard deviation of national mean
i		<i>Clinical Mental Health Counseling:</i> Professional Counseling Students evaluate etiology, nomenclature, diagnosis, treatment, referral, and prevention of mental, behavioral, and neurodevelopmental disorders.	5.C.4	CMHC 610 Practicum: Case Conceptualization Presentation CMHC 615 Internship I: Case Conceptualization Presentation (R) CMHC 620 Internship II: Case Conceptualization Presentation (A)	80% of students will score 85 or better on project rubric 80% of students will score 85 or better on project rubric 80% of students will score 85 or better on project rubric

Table 4. Standard: Introduced (I), Reinforced (R), Assessed (A)

Course	SLO 1										PLO 1	PLO 2	PLO 3
	a.	b.	c.	d.	e.	f.	g.	h.	i.				
COUN 505 – Prof. Orientation													
COUN 550 – Classic Theories of Counseling												I	
COUN 515 – Ethics	I												
COUN 551 – Contemporary Theories of Counseling				I									
CMHC 520 – Diagnosis & Psychopathology		I											
COUN 525 – Counseling Across the Lifespan			I										
COUN 520 – Social & Cultural		R											
COUN 585 – Research & Program Eval					I				I		I		
COUN 605 – Pre-Practicum						I						R	
COUN 530 – Group Counseling & Group Work							I						
CMHC 570 – Foundation of Addictions Counseling	R												
COUN 555 – Crisis, Trauma, & Suicide													
COUN 610 – Practicum										I			I
COUN 510 – Assessment & Appraisal								I	R				
CMHC 575 – Psychopharm & Neuroscience			R									A	
COUN 580 – Career Development and Counseling				R					R				
COUN 615 – Internship I					R					R			R
COUN 635 - Capstone													
COUN 620 – Internship II	A				A					A	R		
CMHC 515 – Intro to Family Post-Grad (NCE, CPCE, Survey)		A	A	A		A	A	A			A		A

Table 5. Key Performance Indicator Assignments

PLO	Course	CACREP Standard	Introduced Reinforced Assessed	KPI
1.a	COUN 515 Ethics	3.A.10	I	Values & Ethics When Dealing with Difficult Situations Research Paper (I)
1.a	CMHC 570 Addictions	3.A.10	R	Addiction Podcast Series Episode #3 Group Project (R)
1.a	CMHC 620 Internship II	3.A.10	A	End of semester paperwork – CCS-R (Site Supervisor) (A)
1.b	COUN 520 Social & Cultural Experiences	3.B.3	R	Culture Immersion Experience Paper (I)
1.b	CMHC 520 Diagnostic Processes	3.B.3	I	Diversity in Mental Illness Group Presentation (R)
1.b	CPCE	3.B.3	A	CPCE Social & Cultural Diversity subscale (A)
1.c	COUN 525 Counseling Across the Lifespan	3.C.10	I	Theory Meets Therapy Project (I)
1.c	CMHC 575 Psychopharmacology & Neuroscience	3.C.10	R	Case Study # 3 Theresa & Paper (R)
1.c	CPCE	3.C.10	A	CPCE Human Growth & Development Subscale (A)
1.d	COUN 551 Contemporary Theories of Counseling	3.D.2	I	Group Project: Determine Approaches Presentation (I)
1.d	COUN 580 Career Development & Counseling	3.D.2	R	Career Development Program Presentation (R)
1.d	CPCE	3.D.2	A	CPCE Career Development Subscale
1.e	COUN 605 Pre-Practicum	3.E.9	I	Recording 6: Session 6 + paperwork (I)
1.e	CMHC 615 Internship I: Midterm Paperwork	3.E.9	R	CMHC 615 Internship I: Midterm Paperwork – CCS-R (Site Supervisor) (R)

	– CCS-R (Site Supervisor) (R)			
1.e	CMHC 620 Internship II: End of Semester Paperwork – CCS-R (Site Supervisor) (A)	3.E.9	A	CMHC 620 Internship II: End of Semester Paperwork – CCS-R (Site Supervisor) (A)
1.f	COUN 530 Group Counseling and Group Work	3.F.4	I	Buechner Process Group Reflection Paper #1 (I)
1.f	CMHC 615 Internship I	3.F.4	R	Case Conceptualization (R)
1.f	CPCE	3.F.4	A	CPCE Group Work subscale (A)
1.g	COUN 510 Assessment and Diagnostic Processes	3.G.8	I	Case Study Report (I)
1.g	COUN 580 Career Development & Counseling	3.G.8	R	Career Assessment Paper (A)
1.h	COUN 510 Assessment & Appraisal	3.H.7	I	Assessments Project Presentation (I)
1.h	COUN 585 Research & Program Evaluation	3.H.7	R	Program Evaluation Paper (R)
1.g	CPCE	3.G.8	A	CPCE Assessment and Diagnostic Processes Subscale (A)
1.i	CMHC 610 Practicum	5.C.4	I	Case Conceptualization Presentation (I)
1.i	CMHC 615 Internship I	5.C.4	R	Case Conceptualization Presentation (R)
1.i	CMHC 620 Internship II	5.C.4	A	Case Conceptualization Presentation (A)
2	COUN 605 Pre-Practicum	2.C	I	Recording 5: Session 5 + paperwork- CCS-R (I)
2	CMHC 620 Internship II	2.C	R	End of Semester Paperwork – CCS-R (Site Supervisor) (R)
2	NA	2.C	A	Alumni/Employer/Business Partner Survey (A)

3	COUN 550 Classic Theories of Counseling	3.B.11	I	Personal Model of Counseling Paper and Video (I)
3	COUN 530 Group Counseling and Group Work	3.B.11	R	Group Process & Spiritual Integration Paper (R)
3	COUN 580 Career Development & Counseling	3.B.11	A	Career Counseling & Spiritual Integration Paper (A)
4	CMHC 610 Practicum	2.F.1., 2., 3., 4.	I	Consultation between Faculty Supervisor and Site Supervisor (I)
4	CMHC COUN 615 Internship I		R	Consultation between Faculty Supervisor and Site Supervisor (R)
4			A	Alumni/Employer/ Business Partner Survey (A)

Table 6. Counseling Dispositions

#	Disposition	When Assessed	How	Benchmark
1	Multicultural Competency	COUN 505 Professional Orientation, COUN 530 Group Counseling, COUN 605 Pre-Practicum, CMHC 615 Internship I	PCPE	80% of students score 3's in all areas
2	Professional Behavior (2, 3 & 11)	COUN 505 Professional Orientation, COUN 530 Group Counseling, COUN 605 Pre-Practicum, CMHC 615 Internship I	PCPE	80% of students score 3's in all areas
3	Professional Ethics	COUN 505 Professional Orientation, COUN 530 Group Counseling, COUN 605 Pre-Practicum, CMHC 615 Internship I	PCPE	80% of students score 3's in all areas
4	Emotional Stability & Self-Control	COUN 505 Professional Orientation, COUN 530 Group Counseling, COUN 605 Pre-Practicum, CMHC 615 Internship I	PCPE	80% of students score 3's in all areas
5	Confidence	COUN 505 Professional Orientation, COUN 530 Group Counseling, COUN 605 Pre-Practicum, CMHC 615 Internship I	PCPE	80% of students score 3's in all areas
6	Record Keeping & Class Assignments	COUN 505 Professional Orientation, COUN 530 Group Counseling, COUN 605 Pre-Practicum, CMHC 615 Internship I	PCPE	80% of students score 3's in all areas
7	Adherence to Policies	COUN 505 Professional Orientation, COUN 530 Group Counseling, COUN 605 Pre-Practicum, CMHC 615 Internship I	PCPE	80% of students score 3's in all areas
8	Adaptability and Flexibility	COUN 505 Professional Orientation, COUN 530 Group Counseling, COUN 605 Pre-Practicum, CMHC 615 Internship I	PCPE	80% of students score 3's in all areas
9	Openness to Feedback	COUN 505 Professional Orientation, COUN 530 Group Counseling, COUN 605 Pre-Practicum, CMHC 615 Internship I	PCPE	80% of students score 3's in all areas
10	Motivation	COUN 505 Professional Orientation, COUN 530 Group Counseling, COUN 605 Pre-Practicum, CMHC 615 Internship I	PCPE	80% of students score 3's in all areas
11	Empathy	COUN 505 Professional Orientation, COUN 530 Group Counseling, COUN 605 Pre-Practicum, CMHC 615 Internship I	PCPE	80% of students score 3's in all areas

In-Person Assessment

Beginning fall of 2026, students will come together with faculty in person to be assessed on counseling skills and dispositions. Students will meet with faculty each summer for this assessment. Faculty will utilize the CCS-R for this assessment.

Method for How Data Will Be Reviewed or Analyzed

All data is reviewed as per outlined in Table 1. A cohort model keeps students in the same classes for their program. All students, their strengths, and their challenges are well-known by all faculty no later than the second semester students are enrolled. First-year courses for all students are identical.

Faculty meet every other week throughout the year, or every week at times when circumstances dictate, to discuss department operations and student progress as needed. If any student is experiencing difficulties with any part of the program, it is brought before the faculty and discussed at length. From those discussions, Professional Concern Forms are completed. If indicated, remediation plans via the SSRC are created tailored to the student's needs and the entire faculty is aware of and active in helping the student overcome any identified obstacle.

While the faculty and students highly value this "organic" and personal component of the program, they also recognize the value of systemic data collection and evaluation. The data we collect are reviewed regularly by the faculty and the program director on an ongoing annual basis.

How Data Will Be Used for Curriculum and Program Improvement

In addition to an ongoing "status update" on all students via regular and frequent faculty meetings, the faculty meet once per academic year to review the curriculum and plan for changes indicated by the review. These, faculty retreats, are formal curricula and program review meetings designed to coincide with the end of the summer semester. Additionally, The CMHC Advisory Board meets twice per academic year to provide outside advice on evaluation and curriculum issues, to name only a few areas.

Other important data also collected and used as well including aggregate student assessment data. The Department collects data to ensure that each of CACREP's Eight Core Areas are targeted. Data that measures learning in these 8 core areas are collected from the CPCE. Key Performance Indicator Assignments supplement this assessment as do the Competency Reviews and Site Supervisor and University Supervisor evaluations of the students

Demographic data collected on applicants is reviewed by several increasingly selective categories: 1. all applications, 2. applicants invited to interview, 3. applicants accepted into the program, and finally, 4. by applicants who have enrolled in the program. The data types include undergraduate GPA, resume, and individual interview. This data is summarized in Annual Reports published to the Department Website to begin in the

25/26 school year.

Additionally, several other forms of data are collected and analyzed at least once per academic year from systemic follow-ups of various stakeholders including former students, supervisors, employers, and business partners.

Process to Identify and Act on Negative Trends

Hypothetical Example: Questions and Facts about Program Objective X

1. What can data tell us about students and their performance in the course,?

2. Program level analysis indicates students perform less well on the present indicator. This is a multi-semester occurrence, and measures taken by the department to remediate the problem have not been consistently successful. How do we remediate the issue?

Hypothetical Facts:

- Course Grades are generally high. Grades of “A” and B are predominant with few or no grades of “C.” Students are performing well in the class.
- Longitudinal data (CPCE over time) suggest that our program has a quality issue with the content area that is likely due to inconsistent faculty and course components.
- Most of the data suggest that we have a systemic problem educating students in this particular content area.

Hypothetical Faculty Discussion and Potential Action Steps:

- Competence in the content area is not confined to one course. We may have simply not adequately integrated it into other courses. All faculty are encouraged to integrate these concepts into their courses immediately.
- Review and recommend ACA approved texts and ancillary resources for course.
- Review and recommend assignment modifications.
- The faculty is unanimous on the assertion that this is an area of concern and commit to remedying the problem.

Hypothetical Issue to Explore: Program Objective X: Name of Content Area/Course/Program

In reviewing the perceived negative trend, we detected in our CPCE data over several years, we identified and studied key performance indicators, and while the analysis gave the faculty ideas about the relatively low scores in the objective in question, little “hard evidence” was identified to support a systemic weakness. When compared to national data, we realized that, while the scores were low for our program, they were not inordinately low as compared to national averages.

Next Step

The Department is aware of deficits that have been corrected for during the writing of the 2024 CACREP self-study. The department experience unexpected changes in leadership two years in a row. In this, assessment information was lost due to leadership change without a clear sense of direction. While we had most of the components of the plan in place, we did not bring the

information together in a way that is easily accessible and understood, and these components were based on the 2016 CACREP Standards. This has been remedied.

The current program director stepped in September 2024 and immediately began course correction. Dr. Merriman has been with the department since 2022 so she had a good sense of the needed corrections. In this, the departments comprehensive assessment plan was designed based on the 2024 CACREP Standards and has been launched. Beginning in the 2025/2026 school year, the outcomes of this plan will be published to the departmental website.

Meanwhile, we have published this Comprehensive Assessment Plan based on data gathered in 2023 to our Department website under "[Resources](#)." This plan was based on the 2016 CACREP Standards. The data did show that students are meeting benchmarks.

Conclusion

The preceding report is designed to explain the comprehensive assessments implemented for determining the effectiveness of the CMHC program at Northwestern College. This plan is posted on the [Counseling Department website](#) under "[Resources](#)."

Any questions about this plan can be addressed to Dr. Julie Merriman, Program Director, julie.merriman@nwcsiowa.edu



COUNSELING PROGRAM

Training counselors to be the hands and feet of Jesus.