

Aligning Undergraduate Rehabilitation Curriculum with the Regional Job Market

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Purpose

- The purpose of this research is to explore common careers for undergraduate rehabilitation graduates (e.g., case management, addictions, independent living, and supported employment).
- Academic programs are encouraged to align their unique curriculum to help prepare graduates for regional job opportunities.
- Consideration of accreditation standards (CoRA/CAAHEP), job markets, host college/university mission, and faculty expertise on curriculum development.

Background

- Undergraduate program began in 1990 with 2 faculty members
- Currently have ≈ 400 majors with 26 full-time faculty
- School has a Bachelor of Science in Rehabilitation Services
 - “General” Rehabilitation Studies
 - Concentration in Deaf & Hard of Hearing
- Bachelor of Science in Addiction Studies (online)
- Minor in Expressive Arts
- Currently average ≈ 225 degrees awarded per academic year
- With as many as 295 degrees awarded AY 2015-2016
- Currently count with over 65 sections of courses each fall and spring term
- Offer courses on two campuses, Edinburg & Brownsville (70 miles apart)
- Use Interactive Television (ITV) format to expand growth

Challenges

- Professional identify of undergraduate program within large masters and PhD programs
- Ensuring sufficient clinical sites for students – aligned with curriculum
- Relevant employment options for BS graduates
- Continued expansion of online learning
- Distance of 2 campuses

Relevant literature

- Evenson and Williamson (1993) studied careers in undergraduate degree in rehabilitation stating primary purposes of the undergraduate programs are to prepare students for direct employment in rehabilitation-related positions and/or graduate work in rehabilitation or allied human service professions.
- Baccalaureate-level rehabilitation majors can be found in virtually any type of agency or program that provides services to people (Evenson and Williamson (1993)
- A study by to James et al. (2010) on undergraduate rehabilitation work roles and functions found providing emotional support to clients, writing client progress and summary notes, advocating for clients, conducting interviews with clients and/or family members to obtain background information, and identifying and securing community resources for clients are job tasks they perform frequently and perceive as very
- Study by Chapin (2004) on employer preferences for bachelor's' and masters level rehabilitation graduates found one agency preferred a master's degree for new hires, but exceptions could be made for specialized caseloads such as those requiring Spanish or sign language as the primary language.
- Oswald, Huck, & Williams (2020) explored undergraduate rehabilitation student perceptions of postgraduation outcomes and professional identity. The most frequently cited reason participants chose the field of rehabilitation services was “a desire to help other people.”
- URDS programs have come to recognize that employability is often a more important consideration than connectivity to historic rehabilitation pathways when students are contemplating career and graduate school opportunities (Oswald, Huck, & Williams,2020).

Curriculum alignment

Rehabilitation Services Foundation Courses:
 *REHS 4305: Case Management for the Spanish Speaking Client
 Concentration/Specialization Courses
 *REHS 3320: Family & Disability
 *REHS 3331: Psychology of Disability
 *Courses offered in Spanish/Bilingual
 Concentration-Specialization Courses
 Addiction Specific courses for major (online)

Discussion

- UTRGV courses provide overlap in curriculum alignment to the Regional Job Market
- Development of curriculum (program) is based on research and job market
- Multicultural challenge serving a predominantly Hispanic community at a Hispanic Serving Institution
- CoRA Accreditation has increased awareness of curriculum alignment to job market (i.e., student survey and employer survey).

Implications for Research and Practice

- Fostering a strong professional identity for students perusing a career in rehabilitation services.
- Research regional job market based on type of population served.

References

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SRCC Postgraduate Student Employment Survey

11-item survey responses between Spring 2020 – Spring 2021 alumni

What was your concentration of study?

- "General" Rehabilitation **70.37%**
- Addictions Studies **18.52%**
- Deaf & Hard of Hearing Studies **11.11%**

Area of employment?

- Case Management **40.00%**
- Special Education **12.00%**
- Addictions **0.00%**
- Supported employment/ Job placement **4.00%**
- Independent Living **0.00%**
- Other **44.00%**

How long did it take you to find employment after graduation?

- 0-3 months **57.69%**
- 4-6 months **15.38%**
- 7-9 months **11.54%**
- 10+ months **15.38%**

TABLE 1. Frequencies of Likert Variables

Items	M (SD)	1Extremely Well n (%)	2Very well n (%)	3Moderately well n (%)	4Slightly well n (%)	5 Not well at all n (%)
1. How well did your undergraduate experience at UTRGV prepare you for your current position?	2.14(1.26)	13 (46.4)	3(10.7)	9(32.1)	1 (3.6)	2(7.1)
2. How well do you feel Rehabilitation Services courses such as Job Placement, Case Management, Medical Aspects, and Assessment in Human Services prepared you for your current job?	1.79(1.07)	16(57.1)	5(17.9)	4(14.3)	3(10.7)	0(0.0)
3. How well did your practicum experience prepare you for the workforce?	2.14(1.24)	11(39.3)	8(28.6)	5(17.9)	2(7.1)	2(7.1)