

The header features a dark blue banner with white and orange text. Above the banner is a photograph of yellow buttercup flowers against a blue sky with white clouds. Below the banner is a photograph of a field of yellow buttercup flowers.

SPRING 2022



WESTERN CONNECTICUT
STATE UNIVERSITY

COUNSELOR EDUCATION UPDATE

Official Newsletter of the Counselor Education Program at WCSU

New Beginnings

DR. NICOLE DERONCK

Victorian writer and poet, Christina Rossetti proclaimed, "Spring is when life's alive in everything!" This is true of the WCSU Counselor Education Program. We are alive and growing on so many levels! Our programs are vibrant. At a time when other programs and other universities are experiencing a decline in enrollment due to the pandemic, our program is alive with energy. For the first time since my arrival on campus in 2016, both the school counseling and clinical mental health programs have lengthy waiting lists in addition to the forty new students whom we have welcomed into the 2022 Cohort.

There is a sense of rebirth as we officially make the move to an online program this summer. Though we may experience some growing pains in the transition, we have the opportunity to work together to get it just right. Our clinical labs associated with the skills classes meeting on the third Saturday of the month (Fall: September, October, November; Spring: February, March, April) offer the opportunity to experience the vivacity of being together while allowing flexibility with the vast majority of learning.

Our students are blossoming. Chi Sigma Iota inducted 37 students in the honor society on March 28 in a beautiful online student-run ceremony. Our new inductees are already branching into leadership roles. Twenty-one of the inductees were students in their first year of the program who met the criteria of completing nine credits and maintaining a minimum 3.5 GPA.

This spring we also offer our congratulations to the 20 students who are receiving their degree or additional endorsements as they move on to take root as professional counselors in our schools and communities.

Yes, WCSU's Counselor Education Program is alive and well as we head into spring!

Nicole DeRonck, Ph.D., Ed.D, CRC, BC-TMH
Counselor Education Program & CACREP Coordinator

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CHI SIGMA IOTA

Dr. Davide Mariotti, Faculty Advisor
Autumn McGuyer, Chapter President



On March 28th, 37 students were initiated into Chi Sigma Iota Counseling Academic and Professional Honor Society (CSI), Zeta Omega Eta Chapter at Western CT State University. All students met the criteria for membership by completing at least 9 credit hours in the graduate program and earning a cumulative GPA of 3.5 or greater. They will receive a membership certificate and pin in recognition of their status as an outstanding counseling student whose accomplishments are consistent with the mission of the international organization and of the CSI Zeta Omega Eta chapter.

Guest speakers for the virtual initiation event were Alumni Bob Schmidt, LPC, author, former school counselor, and in private practice in Sandy Hook, and Lisa Kilcourse, school counselor at Head O'Meadow Elementary School in Newtown and nominee for the National Life Group Foundation's *2022 LifeChanger of the Year Award*. Sixty-three people were in attendance for the program which was hosted by Chapter President, Autumn McGuyer and Ashley DeFreitas, President-Elect.

For more information, please email Dr. Davide Mariotti, mariottid@wcsu, chapter faculty advisor, or Autumn McGuyer, mcguyer001@wcsu, chapter president.

ADVICE FROM A FIRST YEAR STUDENT, TO A FIRST-YEAR STUDENT...

NICK CAREAGA, CLINICAL MENTAL HEALTH '24

Be open to change

- It's not like Undergrad
- There's more independent work
- You will probably need to adjust your study habits and methods
- Time management is key

Keep Moving Forward

- Don't get stuck on a mistake
- Ask professors how you can improve

Learn from Everything

- Professors want you to succeed
- Be transparent with professors and classmates...communication goes a long way

Reach out

- Don't be afraid to ask for help

JESSICA SONI, SCHOOL COUNSELING '24

- Be mindful of extracurricular activities that are available within your program! Dr. DeRonck frequently sends emails about opportunities (see p.3). As an undergraduate I did not care much for student activities or volunteering. As a graduate student I realize it is a terrific way to get to know your professors and classmates. You even meet professionals outside of WCSU, which is beneficial when you are looking for a job or choosing an internship location.
- The thought of graduate school can be stressful because it is higher-level classes and there is more work to be done. Time management is important because a lot of assignments are time consuming. But not one assignment has been difficult. Instead, I find assignments enjoyable because I give myself plenty of time to understand and complete the work.
- There is more presenting and speaking in front of others than I expected when entering the program. I never liked an audience, but I find my cohort to be incredibly supportive. Much of your class is just as nervous as you. I would say, show kindness and support and you will receive it back.

Community Partners and Opportunities

RECHARGE

Relaxation - **E**nergy - **C**onnection - **H**ealth - **A**rt - **R**enewal - **G**rowth - **E**xpression

School counseling students are reaching into communities around CT to help address the mental health needs of middle school students. These opportunities are outside the realm of regular internships and practicums. On March 9, 2022, Mansfield Middle School held their annual RECHARGE DAY. The focus of this day was to broaden 7th and 8th grade students' understanding of wellness and introduce them to hobbies, interests, and daily habits that promote well-being. Student Jessica Soni (School Counseling '24) participated by speaking to 45 students about mental health and healthy coping skills during three 25-minute sessions with students. Jessica partnered with Eileen Melody, a CT School Counseling Association (CSCA) Board Member in Mansfield. This was a great opportunity to support one of our community partners.

SPRING INTO WELLNESS

Eighth-grade Global Studies students from Westside Middle School Academy (Danbury) invited School Counseling students to participate in their "spring into wellness" project. The middle school students chose mental health as their project subject and wanted to focus on depression and anxiety and coping mechanisms. On April 7th and 14th, Acacia Bizier-Lereau and Lili Dickey (School Counseling '23) will help spread awareness and spark important conversations around the topic of mental health! They will also have the opportunity to shadow Curtis Darragh, Westside's school counselor and adjunct faculty for WCSU during the balance of their day at the school.

Counselor Education Comprehensive Exam (CECE) scheduled for April 22-23, 2022

The CECE exam consists of 120 multiple-choice questions that cover all eight CACREP areas (Professional Counseling Orientation and Ethical Practice, Social and Cultural Diversity, Human Growth and Development, Career Development, Counseling and Helping Relationships, Group Counseling and Group Work, Assessment and Testing, and Research and Program Evaluation).

Taking the CECE is a program requirement and a key assessment. Students should pass the exam within 2 standard deviations of the mean. The format and questions are similar to the NCE and serves as good practice for that exam. The test is free to you and usually takes about 2 hours to administer. The CECE will be administered online and will be available for a 48-hour window through Blackboard. Colleen Cox, our CECE test administrator, will be in touch with more details and directions for accessing the test as it gets closer. For those who are interested in preparing for the test, I recommend using the same resources used to study for the NCE. Past students have recommended Arthur's NCE Study Guide and The Encyclopedia of Counseling.

CT SCHOOL COUNSELING ASSOCIATION (CSCA.WILDAPRICOT.ORG)

4/5/22 - Annual Conference (virtual), 8:30 am - 2:30 pm

5/19/22 - Virtual Self-Care Event: Take a Break for Desk Yoga

CT COUNSELING ASSOCIATION (CCACOUNSELING.COM)

Virtual Webinars (Registration fee required, \$10-15 for students):

4/6 - Ethics and Self Care

4/13 - Sex Trafficking of Minors: Recognizing and Responding

4/22 - Honorable Healing: Songs of Military Service to Help Us Relate & Connect

4/29 - Real DBT Skills: Virtual Experience for Practical Application

Summer 2022 Electives

NOTE: Courses listed on OpenClose are incorrect at newsletter printing. Please refer to email(s) from Dr. DeRonck or reference the course list below to register.

Course	CRN	Title	Days	Session	Time	Mode (All On-Line)	Instructor
ED 587	50116	Counseling Diversity	MW	1	4:30-8:30	Hybrid Synch/ <u>Asynch</u>	<u>Mariotti</u>
ED 587	50117	Counseling Diversity	TR	1	4:30-8:30	Hybrid Synch/ <u>Asynch</u>	<u>Mariotti</u>
EPY 620	50181	Marriage & Family Counseling	MW	1	4:30-8:30	Synch class/ <u>Asynch</u> assignments	<u>Wade-Rancourt</u>
EPY 619	50133	Crisis Counseling	TR	1	4:30-8:30	OL	Lomas
EPY 601	50182	Fundamentals of Research & Design	MW	2	4:30-8:30	Synch class/ <u>Asynch</u> assignments	Campbell
EPY 601	50129	Fundamentals of Research & Design	TR	2	4:30-8:30	Synch class/ <u>Asynch</u> assignments	Stewart
EPY 621	50134	Drug & Alcohol Counseling	N/A	2	N/A	<u>Asynch</u>	<u>Mariotti</u>
EPY 628	41203	Grief & Loss Counseling	TR	2	4:30-8:30	Hybrid Synch/ <u>Asynch</u>	<u>Mariotti</u>
EPY 611	50130	Practicum-CMHC	M	1,2,3	3:00-4:30	OL	<u>Naddeo</u>
EPY 611	50131	Practicum-CMHC	M	1,2,3	4:30-6:00	OL	<u>Naddeo</u>
EPY 611	50132	Practicum-CMHC	M	1,2,3	6:00-7:30	OL	<u>Naddeo</u>
EPY 615	50194	Internship-CMHC	W	1,2,3	4:30-6:00	OL	<u>Naddeo</u>
EPY 615		Internship-CMHC	W	1,2,3	3:00-4:30	OL	Canada

HRSA Grant Update

DRS. GABRIEL LOMAS & LORRIE-ANNE MONTE

The HRSA grant continues to provide wonderful benefits for WCSU students. Currently, we have students enrolled in both the graduate Nursing and Counseling programs who are receiving stipends during fieldwork. This is part of a larger plan to break down silos, find common instructional objectives, and engage in collaborative learning. We achieve this through collaborative events and providing a series of professional development opportunities.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A series of Specialized training was held to help students and stakeholders better understand trauma treatments:

- Alumnus **Olivia Lynch, M.S., LPC** did two presentations on Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), an evidence-based therapeutic treatment that is often administered by behavioral health providers. Ms. Lynch is a certified trainer and works as a supervisor and trainer for Newport Academy.
- 33 students and community leaders completed virtual **PREPaRE** training in January. PREPaRE is an evidence-informed school crisis management program, developed by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). Training in this model is interdisciplinary, allowing school counselors to collaborate with school leaders, teachers, and other school-based professionals to prepare, prevent, and respond to crisis situations. We hope to repeat this training over the next few years with the goal of training students and stakeholders in the model.
- **John Crocker, Director of School Mental Health and Behavioral Services in Methuen, MA**, is founder of the Massachusetts School Mental Health Consortium (MASMHC), a group of approximately one-hundred and fifty school districts across Massachusetts committed to advocating for and implementing quality and sustainable school mental health services and supports. Mr. Crocker presented Trauma Sensitive School Counseling.

COLLABORATION

Inter-professional Collaboration with the Graduate Nursing Dept. and UG Social Work Dept.:

- On January 29th, the theme of the day was diversity and three amazing speakers addressed topics in social justice: The morning was kicked off by **Dr. Angela Haeny, Director of the Race, Equity, & Addiction Lab at Yale**. Dr. Haeny spoke on racism and social justice in the healthcare field. We were honored to hear from **Cara Mackler, MSW, from the Center for Empowerment**, who spoke on Interpersonal Partner Violence or IPV. The day was capped by **Pete Carney, LCSW**, who spoke on cultural competency and shared strategies and tips to be more inclusive with the LGBTQ population.
- The collaboration continued on January 31, when nearly 100 nursing and counseling students, faculty, and simulation patients (actors) participated in encounters where nursing and counseling students were challenged to screen, interview and refer a patient to further services. We look forward to integrating simulation experiences into the curriculum over the next few years.
- We are collaborating with the Social Work Dept. in April to conduct simulations in field seminar classes. Undergrad Juniors will practice interviewing skills with Simulated Patients.
- We will again collaborate with the Nursing Dept. April 22 to focus on Climate Change, Environmental Health and Environmental Justice with students, and offer strategies to faculty to include climate change issues to courses.

These programs were supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an award totaling \$492,142 with 0% financed with non-governmental sources. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement by, HRSA, HHS, or the U.S. Government.

For more information, please visit [HRSA.gov](https://www.hrsa.gov) or contact Grant Co-Directors, Dr. Gabriel Lomas, lomasg@wcsu.edu, or Dr. Lorrie-Anne Monte, montel@wcsu.edu.

Alumnus Spotlight

YARA ZOCCARATO



Yara Zoccarato is currently the Student Support Liaison in the Pre-Collegiate & Access Programs at WCSU. She graduated from the School Counseling Master's Program in May 2021 and has been in her current position since September of 2019.

Her story begins in Alexandria, VA when she decided to return to school to become a School Counselor. She graduated from UCONN in 2014, double majored in Political Science and Latin American Studies, with a minor in Economics. During her undergraduate studies, she wanted to go into politics and international relations as a career. She had moved to the DMV area in an attempt to work in the field related to her Bachelor's Degree, but was working in the insurance business.

While there, she began volunteering with an organization called Edu-Futuro, an organization that offers students grades 9-12 a series of workshops that help students develop professional skills to become leaders in their communities, gain knowledge about the college application process, and offered weekly one-on-one coaching and mentoring services. As a trilingual Brazilian immigrant, an alumna of the TRIO Upward Bound Program at WCSU, and a first-generation college student, Lara understood and valued the services Edu-Futuro was providing to the youth in the community. She started volunteering as a mentor with them on Saturdays. She worked with students, helping them gain confidence in themselves and educating them and their parents about post-secondary opportunities. She really enjoyed her work with the students. One day she thought,

"I can do this as a school counselor versus just on Saturdays."

This career could allow her to give back to her community too. As an individual who benefited from the services of the TRIO Upward Bound Program during high school, she understood the need for representation amongst educators in today's schools and knew she could assist students and their families navigate their post-secondary plans.

When her search began for Master's programs, staying in the DMV area was too expensive. She spoke to Dr. DeRonck on the phone to learn more about the program at WCSU, and within two months of speaking to her, she was back in Danbury to start the program. She was offered her current position at WCSU a year after her return to CT. Her Upward Bound mentor from high school, who also wrote a letter of recommendation to the WCSU SC program, informed her of the EAP Bridge and PASS Program position. Eager to leave the insurance business, she was "flattered by the recommendation" and immediately applied!

The EA²P Bridge and PASS Program works with over 150 WCSU students. Peer PASS Mentors work with students every week to help establish and apply fundamental skills such as time management, organizational, and studying skills that will help them achieve their academic goals at WCSU. Their programs also collaborate with other departments on campus to assure students are aware of the different services they have on campus such as the Student Counseling Center, The Tutoring Resource Center, The Writing Center, the Math Clinic, etc. The website is: www.wcsu.edu/pcaap

The SC classes, especially those focused on group counseling and SEL (Social-Emotional Learning), further emphasized that a student's academic performance is more complex than a student simply understanding a concept, attending class, completing assignments, or passing exams. From Yara's student interactions, she's constantly reminded of the unique challenges students face outside of the classroom or off-campus. She stresses that "students who are here, are here to learn and obtain a college degree, but not every student begins at the same starting line, not every student can live on campus, and not every student can only focus on school." Many students work full-time jobs, are financially independent, or are caregivers to their families. Therefore, their college experience is shaped by not only what happens on campus, but also outside of campus.

As a college graduate and faculty member, Yara understands what a student needs to be successful in their class; and so do students. Sometimes, a student simply needs someone to acknowledge their progress, someone to lend an ear, or someone to simply refer them to the right resource. Overall, while "data" is important, she felt the SC faculty and class discussions did a great job emphasizing the SEL portion of the field in the curriculum.

The best part about her job, she says, is working with students. It's a bonus she's with college students and doesn't need to deal with parents as much as if she were to work in a high school or middle school, "lol." But truthfully, "the best part is working with students and seeing them make progress towards their academic and career goals."

Ultimately, Yara's advice for new graduates would be:

Take the plunge! Apply for the job and be open to different employment opportunities. Don't be afraid to move. If I hadn't moved to VA, I wouldn't have volunteered with Edu-Futuro and had the experience that led me to a counseling career. When informed about the position at WCSU, I thought I wasn't qualified. But if I hadn't applied, I would have missed out on this opportunity and job that I truly enjoy. So, take the plunge, apply for the job and don't be afraid to change zip codes."