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Program Closure Approval - Grief, Loss, and Trauma Graduate Certificate

University of Tennessee, Knoxville

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
TENNESSEE
KNOXVILLE

October 31, 2024

Dr. Kevin Sightler
Substantive Change Office
SACS Commission on Colleges
1866 Southern Lane
Decatur, GA 30033

Re: Program Closure - Grief, Loss, and Trauma Graduate Certificate Program

Dear Kevin,

Please accept this letter as notification of the closure of an existing graduate certificate program in Grief, Loss, and Trauma, effective August 18, 2025.

The Grief, Loss, and Trauma graduate certificate program has had very low enrollment, comprised solely of current graduate students. The certificate has had relatively high interest as an add-on option for graduate students enrolled in counseling; however, few graduate students have completed the certificate since a change in interpretation of the graduate catalog that adds 3 credit hours to an intensive two-year, 60 credit MS Counseling degree.

Enrollments have continued to appear high because the university requires students to apply for the certificate prior to completing six credit hours of certificate requirements. Because certificate enrollment was comprised almost exclusively of MS Counseling students, students completed the first six certificate hours in their first semester as part of other program requirements. Thus, students have historically been advised to apply to the certificate in their first semester of their program.

In fall 2023, department faculty decided to begin phasing out the Grief, Loss, and Trauma graduate certificate program. The faculty associated with the closure were unanimous in their support for the closure. No staff members were impacted by the closure. In fall 2024, the department closed the certificate through university channels. This closure was approved at the university level in fall 2024. As of fall 2024, 18 students were enrolled in the certificate. They initially applied in case they wanted to complete the certificate; however, they chose not to enroll in fall 2023 or fall 2024 offerings of COUN 560, which has been discontinued after fall 2024.

The department has been actively communicating with current, lapsed, and prospective students as well as faculty, staff, and partners. Beginning in August 2023, the department added a note on its website regarding the phase-out. At the start of the fall 2024 semester, the interim department head emailed all students enrolled in the

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certificate to advise that COUN 560 would not be offered in fall 2025, or beyond. The interim department head made parallel announcements to all students enrolled in the certificate prior to registration opening in spring 2024 and again prior to start of the fall 2024 semester. All students enrolled in the certificate who had not completed COUN 560 attended advising meetings with full-time counselor education faculty members in fall 2023 and spring 2024. All advisors addressed the need to enroll in the fall 2024 section of COUN 560 should students wish to complete the certificate. The course was scheduled at a time that all students could attend. Of the 13 students who needed to take COUN 560 to meet certificate requirements, only 2 chose to do so.

There are no students with lapsed enrollment in the certificate. Prospective students for this certificate are primarily MS in Counseling students in their first semester of the program. Thus, we communicated to all MS and PhD students in counseling via email regarding plans for phasing out the program. The department explicitly mentioned plans to phase out the certificate in biweekly program information sessions for prospective students throughout AY 2023-24. After receiving university approvals to close the certificate, we strengthened this language in information sessions for AY 2024-25.

Should you have any questions or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Heather Hartman
SACSCOC Liaison

Cc: Donde Plowman, Chancellor
John Zomchick, Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor
Ozlem Kilic, Interim Vice Provost for Academic Affairs
Ellen McIntyre, Dean, College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences