

TEN CAREER PATHS

for

**PROFESSIONAL
COUNSELORS**

TRAVIS STEWART



OVERVIEW

In Covenant Seminary's residential and highly relational program, we prepare clinical mental health counselors for licensure to care for clients of all backgrounds and cultural groups with dignity and respect. We train students to evaluate and utilize contemporary research and clinical skills from a biblical framework so they might respectfully and graciously enter the story of clients to encourage, comfort, challenge and invite them to greater health, hope, agency, and transformation.

Graduates leave our program prepared for licensure, transformed by grace, and ready to help hurting people heal and grow. 93% of Covenant graduates pursuing their counseling passion have found employment within 6 months of graduation in a variety of professional settings.

Let's explore 10 career paths open to licensed professional counselors (LPCs) and hear from Covenant graduates who work in those fields:

1. Private practice
2. Community and clinical mental health
3. Government and State Agencies
4. Crisis counseling
5. Treatment facilities
6. School-based jobs
7. Hospital-based jobs
8. Higher education
9. Non-profit setting
10. For-profit and private sector

PRIVATE PRACTICE

Working in a private practice offers professionals independence and freedom. Whether a counselor owns their own business or works with a larger agency, private practice generally offers some of the following benefits:

- Being your own boss
- Control over your schedule
- Freedom to determine your areas of specialty
- Choice in what types of clients you will accept
- Flexibility with schedule and vacation

Counselors in full-time private practice tend to have a higher ceiling for potential income than their counterparts who work in other settings, with hourly rates that average \$60 to \$120 according to thervo.com¹. Of course, therapists in high demand can charge more and the rates vary depending on where one lives.

Before you do the math and imagine yourself seeing 40 clients a week at \$120 per hour and making \$250,000 per year, realize that seeing 8 clients a day for 5 straight days is unusual and can be extremely draining. Also, taxes, insurance, and overhead (rent, marketing, etc.) costs all come out of what clients pay you. This is just one of the challenges to being in private practice. Other responsibilities include:

- Paperwork, billing, accounting, taxes, liability insurance, etc.
- Acquiring clients through managing a website, social media, networking, and advertising

¹ As of September 2022

- Working with insurance panels (should you choose to accept insurance)
- Fluctuating income dependent upon developing a consistent client load
- Unpaid vacation and days off (when you are not seeing clients, you are not getting paid)
- Regularly working alone (you'll need to seek out supervision as well as support from colleagues)

Many of the challenges that come from working in a private practice setting come at the beginning as you try and build a caseload and may have to work evening or weekend hours.

Caleb Mitchell (Class of 2003) co-founded the Phoenix Counseling Collaborative with his wife Elisa after working in a residential treatment center and as a counseling pastor in the local church. He has found the independence of private practice both fulfilling and challenging.

Caleb, like many counselors who own a private practice, has had to learn many skills required to run a successful business. "At first, I did everything myself. That's the difficult part of starting out. It's all on you." But over time, Caleb began to outsource tasks like accounting, payroll, and taxes.

"I started out using an office in the church where I had previously worked. This allowed me a rent-free space which was great, because I didn't have a lot of capital saved up. Now our offices are located in an old house that has about 2,500 square feet and we have 10 people on our team, including interns."

Also, the flexibility is a two-edged sword. On the one-hand you have the freedom to decide who you see as

clients and when you see them. You also can take days off when you want them. On the downside, you don't get paid when you take a day off and you will need to arrange for your own health insurance, retirement plans, and be motivated to create structure for yourself.

Caleb has been encouraged by how his practice is growing and impacting the city of Phoenix. "I like working for myself and creating an environment for both our clients and the therapists who have come to work with us. Our goal is to create a safe space for anyone to come and talk about what's going on with their story. That includes our team. We want it to be a place where they are learning and growing."

COMMUNITY & CLINICAL MENTAL HEALTH

In 1963, President Kennedy signed the Community Mental Health Centers Act which required that mental health services be available to indigent and low-income individuals. These locally based centers offer assessment, diagnosis, and treatment for a wide range of issues for people of all ages, across the country.

Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) are also government-funded services but offer more than just mental health services. Walk into a center like this and you might find dentists, physicians, nurse practitioners, and substance abuse counselors. Many of these are in low-income or rural areas or near reservations for Native Americans.

DeAnn Yount, LCSW is a Visiting Instructor in Counseling at Covenant Seminary and has spent much of her career working in these settings. According to her, there are

several benefits available to professional counselors who work in this field:

- The training available to professionals is exceptional. Professionals are given time, money, and opportunity to seek training in skillsets needed to help clients. FQHCs can offer free training through Federal dollars, many times in the cutting-edge therapies such as EMDR, Trauma Focused-CBT, and Motivational Interviewing. These would normally cost thousands of dollars to the therapist.
- Working with a multi-disciplinary team exposes you to other professionals and expands your knowledge and ability to treat patients from a well-rounded perspective.
- While the pay is not as high as you might make in private practice, the benefits are often very good and include paid time off, and health insurance.
- In addition to the benefits package, therapists working at FQHC agencies may be eligible for a student loan forgiveness program which can help pay off loans in as little as 5 years.
- Many organizations provide supervision needed for licensure at no additional cost.
- Agencies assist counselors get added to insurance panels.
- In these settings you will often work with the hardest cases and people who are deeply broken. This is a way to truly impact hurting people. Yount says, "If the Church is to truly be effective, we need to understand the most broken people."

For counselors just starting in the counseling field, working in these settings provides an incredible opportunity to be trained, licensed, and work in the

trenches while developing a skillset which will serve them for the rest of their career.

Of course, working with people in severe mental or physical distress can take a toll on helping professionals, often because the need is so great. According to DeAnn, "You can get burned out because you feel like you need to save everyone." You must care for yourself, set healthy boundaries and advocate for your own work-life balance."

GOVERNMENT AND STATE AGENCIES

In addition to the centers mentioned in the previous section, there are many other counseling jobs available with Federal and State government agencies. A few of these diverse settings include:

- Foster care
- Police departments
- Prisons
- Veteran Affairs
- Assertive Community Treatment teams
- Group homes
- Military chaplaincy

Laurie Fulper (Class of '98) works on an Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) team. These teams are made up of professionals who serve those with severe and persistent mental illness. These professionals are the first and sole providers of all the services an individual may need. Typically, these teams have a low individual-

to-staff ration which increases the personal care. According to Laurie, her day begins with a morning staff meeting to review the needs of each individual before heading out to meet with clients. Her team of nine multidisciplinary professionals serves 56 individuals and has the goal of serving them by keeping them out of hospitals and institutions.

"We try to do everything we can to keep them living independently though we have several in Assisted Living Facilities and group homes. We help find them jobs, manage their medications, find housing, and help with adult living skills as well as providing different types of therapy for their mental health needs and substance abuse issues (as many have these co-occurring issues).

I love working with this population. They are some of the most needy in our field and honestly could not live in the community without our help. Maintaining their dignity while also providing service is very important and unfortunately not a priority for many in the community that don't understand mental illness."

Working for state and federal agencies also offers stability. Unlike, privately owned businesses, the government will never go out of business or be bought by another company. Short of major political changes or events, job security is strong.

Additionally, health care plans, retirement, and time off policies are generous in government positions. Federal holidays are observed and not subtracted from your paid time off.

On the flip side, working for the government does not offer as much financial compensation or salary increases. On top of that, you will have to deal with the bureaucracy and red tape associated with government

jobs and may often find yourself fighting government policies or procedures which don't always seem to be in the best interests of the client.

CRISIS COUNSELING

According to the American Counseling Association, the "primary purpose of 1:1 (one on one) crisis counseling is to help an individual to restore some sense of control and mastery after a crisis event or disaster."² In these situations, a person's normal coping skills may be overwhelmed, leading them to feel unsafe, traumatized, or even question their basic beliefs about themselves and the world around them.

The goal of crisis counseling is to provide support so that people in crisis can regain a sense of safety and stability. In doing this, crisis counselors often provide concrete, practical solutions to immediate problems people are facing.

Ben Perrin graduated from the counseling program in 2012. Initially he served as a mental health case manager and family counselor for children and their families facing behavioral and mental health challenges. Eventually, Ben landed a job as the Director of Disaster Response for a denominationally affiliated organization. Though the day-to-day responsibilities between his roles are quite different, he sees how his counseling degree informs how he serves individuals, families, and communities impacted by disasters.

² <https://www.counseling.org/docs/trauma-disaster/fact-sheet-10---1on1-crisis-counseling.pdf>

“When I was working with kids who had behavioral and mental health needs I saw first-hand how mental illness impacted them. I had the privilege of walking with many families through grief, violence, and loss. That experience, along with my training at Covenant, has prepared me in serving the emotional, spiritual, and physical needs of people who have survived natural disasters like flooding and tornados here in the Midwest. In my role, being a licensed professional counselor gives me the knowledge and credibility needed to navigate emotionally challenging situations and to best serve people when they are in crisis.”

Because crisis counseling is generally short-term, counselors provide connections to local resources where individuals can get long-term support and ongoing therapy.

There can be great reward in helping people in crisis, but it also requires counselors to practice good self-care and be aware of how confronting the harsh realities of disasters and suicide can take a toll.

TREATMENT FACILITIES

For individuals with chronic or severe mental health conditions such as addictions, eating disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder, or life-threatening depression, admitting to a residential treatment center can be lifesaving.

While counselors in private practice generally see clients once a week, in residential treatment settings, counselors have multiple interactions with clients throughout the week. In many treatment centers, counselors will have 2-3 individual sessions, one family session, and multiple

group therapy sessions each week with every client. This means that the caseload for the counselor is smaller, but more intensive. While an outpatient counselor may see 25 or more clients per week, a counselor in a residential treatment center will usually only work with 4-5 clients at a time.

Sarah Hartung (class of 2014) worked as a therapist in a residential treatment center for eating disorders. Like others who have worked with multidisciplinary teams, Sarah was grateful for the opportunity to interact with other professionals as they discussed and planned care for the clients. "The team approach was so fun for me. I loved having the constant communication with other professionals and the chance to learn from more experienced counselors."

Residential settings also provide an opportunity for more intense clinical work with more client interaction. In her case, Sarah had 3 individual sessions each week in addition to interactions with clients in groups. Sarah says, "I enjoyed running groups and seeing the intersection between what a client was working on in the individual setting also be addressed in a group setting."

Treatment settings often provide clients with many forms of therapy in addition to talk-therapy. "Residential treatment is where I discovered drama therapy" says Hartung. She now incorporates this into her private practice when possible. Drama therapy is just one type of expressive therapy that helps clients access thoughts and feelings through physical and creative means. Many residential treatment centers include some of the following expressive and experiential therapies:

- Art therapy
- Music therapy
- Drama therapy

- Equine (horses) therapy
- Rope courses
- Dance and movement therapy
- Writing and poetry therapy

Many students, while working on their graduate degree, find jobs working as mental health technicians at treatment centers. While not providing individual counseling to clients at the center, responsibilities include building therapeutic relationships with clients, helping when they are in crisis, teaching coping skills, and eating meals with the clients. Matt Tilley (class of 2019) worked at a treatment center as a mental health technician while completing his education. Matt says that though the job was difficult at times, "I formed great friendships there and learned so much about counseling, trauma, therapeutic theories, being assertive with clients, and administration in the counseling world."

Working at a treatment center also offers a variety of positions for someone with a master's level education. A primary therapist is responsible for the individual and family counseling provided to a patient and generally acts as the primary advocate for the case management and patient's care. Family Therapists specialize in leading groups or working with onsite family programming when family members visit or participate in the treatment of their loved one.

Many administrators and those in leadership positions at treatment centers began their careers as counselors. Eventually, they step into clinical, marketing, or business positions at the treatment center and find it helpful to receive additional training in business skills.

On the flip side, working for a treatment center can be difficult as you have less choice in who you see as clients

(they are typically assigned to you by leadership), are working with clients who are severely compromised, and may find yourself at odds with the business model of the facility. Sarah states, "I would often find myself in a conflict of interest between what I thought was in the best interest of the client and what was in the interest of the bottom line of the business. I didn't always have the power to do what I felt was needed for the client."

Despite the challenges, working in a residential treatment setting often provides counselors with a clear sense that they are making a difference in the lives of hurting people. The hard work is balanced by the evidence that you are involved in saving lives.

SCHOOL-BASED JOBS

Counselors who work in a school-based job thrive when they use their clinical to engage kids and families through the challenges they are facing. Amanda Cole (Class of '06) says, "I had no idea about school-based health clinics until I started working in one." She provides mental health services for students in underserved communities alongside other medical professionals.

Amanda says, "For me, it's a great fit because I get to be in the room with adolescents and walk them through whatever they're facing, often issues related to anxiety, depression, adjustment, grief and loss, family dysfunction/conflict and/or trauma.

This job was an absolute gift from God. When I started, I was a single mom, providing for my daughter. I was able to work 3/4 time (30 hours a week) and have benefits, including health insurance and retirement contributions from my employer. For 10 weeks in the summer, I work

20 hours a week and keep my benefits. I have lots of flexibility. And our needs are met. I get to practice in my field and have a consistent paycheck.”

Working in a school setting, Jamie Pollard (Class of '01), has had several different roles, including working with deaf and hard-of-hearing students, in a rural public school and in a private all-girls school. Her duties have ranged from educational staff meetings, consultations with educators and parents, crisis counseling, suicide assessment, and working closely with the school nurses.

According to Jamie, “school counselors use brief, solution-focused approaches and a LOT of good listening skills.” She also estimates that 25-50% of her job involves interacting with students who drop by and “just want to talk.”

In addition to providing a listening ear to students or helping them in crisis, school counselors often have other job responsibilities including scheduling, assisting administrators with decisions regarding discipline and providing seminars on topics like mental health, sexuality, careers, and college admission processes.

Therapeutic schools are another educational setting where you will find professional counselors employed. While in traditional schools the focus is understandably on education, in therapeutic schools therapy is more central to the task of the entire administration.

The goal of a therapeutic boarding school is to create an entire environment that addresses behavioral issues, emotional distress and supports healing throughout the week. And much like treatment centers, therapeutic boarding schools use a full menu of therapeutic interventions to meet the needs of the students. These may include:

- Individual and group therapy
- Skill building
- Experiential therapies (art, drama, music)
- Equine therapy
- Ropes and challenge courses

HOSPITAL-BASED JOBS

Hospital settings can provide several different career opportunities for professional counselors in a variety of different settings including medical, behavioral, or psychiatric hospitals. The care they provide for patients and families comes when people are in pain and facing difficult choices. Job responsibilities include assessments, identifying resources, discharge planning, and providing individual, family or group counseling.

Steve Dalbey, who graduated from Covenant in 2008, currently works as a Behavioral Health Therapist with a large health care system providing virtual services to medical patients. He is part of a team of professionals that includes physicians, psychiatrists, nurses, dietitians, and physical therapists. "I love working with a team and being able to ask the other professionals for their insight into a patient's situation."

Steve meets with clients virtually as they receive medical treatment for conditions like COPD, cancer, heart disease, and other chronic conditions. He begins with a thorough mental health assessment to gather information that will allow him to best support the patient. Individual sessions are then used to discuss how the patients are feeling about their medical condition and navigating treatment.

Steve has loved the opportunity to work with people from all walks of life. "I have the privilege of working with some of the most underserved populations in our area. These are people who often feel like no one else cares for them. I get to meet them where they are at, look them in the eye, and treat them as someone made in the image of God."

Matt Uldrich ('03) received a counseling degree, a Master of Divinity, and a Doctor of Ministry from Covenant and has worked in both pastoral and clinical settings. His most challenging job was as a qualified mental health provider (QMHP) in a level 5 prison facility. "I was regularly checking in on the health of the prisoners as well as providing basic counseling services and psychoeducation. I regularly interacted with individuals convicted of murder and abuse. It was quite the education."

Matt also has served as a crisis counselor for emergency rooms. This job included assessing individuals who came to the ER for suicide and either helping to get them admitted to the hospital, another treatment facility, or, if they were safe and stable, connecting them with outpatient resources in their area.

He emphasized the importance of self-care in these highly stressful environments. "At first, I was not taking care of myself. Eventually, when my health was declining, I started making changes." He now works as an EAP therapist as well as doing some private practice with his wife Cheri (class of '03).

HIGHER EDUCATION

Counseling centers at colleges and universities are like outpatient counseling services in many respects. These counselors offer individual and group sessions to students who may be dealing with homesickness, adjusting to the academic load, or dealing with issues such as anxiety, depression, addiction or gender and sexuality confusion. Job descriptions can include some of the following responsibilities:

- Providing brief counseling for individuals, groups, and couples
- Assessment, treatment planning, and crisis intervention
- Presenting seminars and workshops on mental health-related topics
- Working with other university professionals to support students who are struggling

Often, the issues that counselors in higher education address with clients are unique to the college setting, such as adjusting to life away from home, handling newfound freedom, access to drugs and alcohol, confusion over choosing a major, and dealing with questions of identity, faith, and values.

One limitation that many college counselors face is fewer sessions with the student/client. Many colleges offer free counseling to students but limit the number of sessions. If students still desire counseling after meeting this limit, they are referred to local outpatient counselors.

Professionals with counseling degrees can also be found working in other settings within higher education, using

their knowledge of people and clinical skills to support student life, residential housing, and teaching courses.

NON-PROFIT SETTINGS

Non-profit counseling organizations have many different missions. Some provide care for women suffering domestic abuse while others provide crisis pregnancy and adoption services. Other types of non-profits can include:

- Foster care
- Family counseling
- Individual counseling
- Adoption services
- Refugee services
- Sex trafficking victim services
- Sober living
- Suicide prevention
- Support groups of all kinds
- Disaster response organizations

Lou Carmichael (class of 2006) started her counseling career at a Christian non-profit organization that offered many of these services. Her role specifically focused on supporting mothers who were considering placing their children for adoption.

“Often times I would speak with moms about their birthing plans and be there after they had their babies. I would also assist in linking birth moms with adopted families by way of introduction. I loved working with these brave women and found it an honor to walk with them in these tough decisions.”

Depending on the organization, working in a non-profit can offer many benefits including a salaried position, health insurance, and paid vacation time. Employees are also less likely to feel the tension between client care and profits that are present in many for-profit organizations.

You may also have more opportunities to learn other skills at a non-profit agency since the staff size will likely be smaller, including fundraising, event planning, and public speaking.

Overall, non-profits are driven by their mission to make the world a better place which can provide a rewarding work experience for a counselor.

FOR-PROFIT & PRIVATE SECTOR

Some counselors find employment in businesses and the private sector. An example of this is working as an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) counselor. EAPs are programs offered by companies to help their workers resolve personal problems that may be affecting their mental health, social skills, or performance. Traditionally, these counselors have helped employees with alcohol, substance abuse, or depression, but may also help with relational difficulties, financial problems, or trauma recovery. These services, which may also be available to spouses and children, are offered at no cost to the workers as some companies understand that a healthy workforce and working environment helps strengthen the bottom line.

Martha Ankeny (Class of '03), after working in setting with severely ill adults and children, accepted a job as an EAP counselor for an organization that provided services to local businesses.

“It was a very professional environment and felt very much like a for profit business as opposed to a not-for-profit. I loved that the clients that we served were all working and higher functioning and had more possibility of change than in my work at an agency working with severely mentally ill adults and children.”

I mainly approved people for different services as we offered elder care, phone counseling, therapy, financial advisors, childcare assistance, and various other services. I was also in charge of finding resources for the company website for clients to read about various issues. And I was allowed to do phone sessions for people that were 30 minutes long. I enjoyed the types of clients I had at the EAP.”

The hard thing was that the level of care we could provide was based on what their company paid for, not on what the client needed. There was one contract we had with a company that provided unlimited counseling for their employees, but most only provided 3 sessions and then they had to be referred out to a contracted therapist in the community. This was really difficult for me because I quickly realized I would mostly be doing brief therapy and then sending my clients out to see another therapist to do the bulk of the work.”

EAP counselors may also work with individuals who are required to seek therapy for anger issues or difficulty focusing on their work. This can be a difficult situation for counselors if the clients are not motivated for change.

If you like working with a variety of clients, seeking out and providing resources for people, and providing brief-solutions, focused care, and you can see yourself thriving

in a business environment. a job in an EAP setting might be a great fit for you.

Utilization Review Clinicians (UR) work to determine the type and length of treatment coverage appropriate for individuals. UR clinicians can be employed by either the insurance companies or the providers such as treatment centers. If working for a treatment center, an UR clinician is communicating the progress of the client while in treatment and generally advocating for as much coverage as possible. If working for an insurance company, the clinician is trying to determine what level of care and treatment is most appropriate according to professional standards.

Alexa Thompson (class of 2003) has worked in UR for much of her career. In describing her experience, she writes, "It was definitely a career turn that I didn't anticipate but ended up loving."

Alexa describes some of the daily tasks she does, "I would have a phone conversation directly with a provider lasting approximately 30 minutes, where we discussed symptoms, treatment planning, barriers, progress, etc. These are collaborative phone calls—sometimes the end result was a discussion about a different level of treatment, whether that be a less intensive level of care or a more intensive level of care."

It can be challenging at times though. Alexa says, "Probably the most difficult part was the uphill battle to not just be seen as the [company] that doesn't want to pay for services." She sees it differently though, "Although rendering a decision was our ultimate role, we were team members in planning care for these kids. It was definitely an opportunity to use clinical skills and knowledge to still support, just in a different way. "

TAKING THE NEXT STEP

Throughout our program, students interact with experienced professionals in variety of career fields. Our faculty and staff partner with schools, hospitals, treatment centers, non-profits, universities, government agencies, and private practices in our classes and through our intern program to train our graduates to work in a variety of settings.

Covenant Seminary has been training licensed professional counselors since 1992. Counseling people in pain is a profound privilege. Offering them hope, and the invitation to change, is the work of mature, self-aware, educated, and compassionate professionals. It also requires professionals who understand mental health diagnosis, contemporary research, and effective treatments. We are committed to providing a transformative educational and personal experience that is clinically strong and rooted in grace.

We help students harmonize contemporary counseling theories and techniques with a Christian worldview. Graduates leave our program prepared for licensure, transformed by grace, and ready to help hurting people heal and grow.

This work is accomplished by placing a high value on the student-faculty relationship, intensive mentoring and academic rigor that integrates the Christian faith with the latest research. These values are evident in what we call the 5 Foundations of the MAC program.

THE 5 FOUNDATIONS OF THE COVENANT SEMINARY COUNSELING PROGRAM

A BIBLICAL FRAMEWORK

Of the program's 75 credit hours, 15 provide a theological foundation for clinical practice. With this biblical understanding of God, human nature, and the process of change, our graduates evaluate and develop gospel-centered counseling theories and techniques.

CLINICAL MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELING

Designed for those seeking licensure, the MAC provides a clinically robust education in diagnosis, theories, techniques, ethics, and current mental health research. This degree is CACREP-aligned and closely matches license board requirements in most states.

DIGNITY & RESPECT

We believe the counseling relationship should mirror the gracious relationship that Christ has with His church. Students learn to relate to clients of all genders, races, faiths, beliefs, and life experiences with respect and empathy while building a collaborative partnership for the client's well-being.

RESIDENTIAL & RELATIONAL

You will receive twice the recommended hours of supervision by CACREP and significantly more than other graduate programs because we believe students best learn to become counselors in the context of relational mentoring by faculty in our residential setting.

THE POWER OF STORY

Mental health develops in the context of a story: relationships, problems, beliefs, and life experiences. We help students understand the power of story—both theirs and their clients’—so they can enter into the counseling relationship with both kindness and insight.

INQUIRE TODAY

To learn more about the MAC program fill out an [inquiry form](#) today and one of our admissions counselors will contact you. Together, we will trust God to guide you as you seek to impact the lives of others.

To learn more, visit www.covenantseminary.edu/inquire

WHAT CAREER PATHS EXIST FOR PROFESSIONAL COUNSELORS?

Getting a Master of Arts in Counseling degree is only the beginning. Then what?

We asked 400 Covenant Seminary counseling alumni how they are using their degree. We then combined their answers into the ten most common career paths.

TRAVIS STEWART, LPC, MATS

has spent over 20 years working in the mental health field. He specializes in the treatment of eating disorders, with experience both as a clinician and marketer for several treatment centers. He has taught classes and supervised practicum groups at Covenant Seminary, where he serves both as an adjunct faculty member and Director of Development.

