

UWF Counseling Program

Graduate Student Training Policies

School of Psychological and Behavioral Sciences (SPBS)

(revised November, 2011)

Overview and General Issues

- A. The Counseling Program Graduate Student Policy is intended to supplement the School of Psychological and Behavioral Sciences Graduate Student Handbook, the University of West Florida Student Handbook, and the University of West Florida Catalog. Each student is expected to obtain, read, be familiar with, and abide by all of these.
- B. Upon admission to the program, the student will sign a statement certifying that he/she has read and agrees to abide by Counseling Program, School of Psychological and Behavioral Sciences, and University policies (Appendix A). This statement should be signed and placed in the student's file prior to registration for classes.
- C. Responsibility for completing all applications, meeting all deadlines, and complying with the requirements and policies of the Counseling Program, School of Psychological and Behavioral Sciences, and University rests entirely with the student.
- D. In order to assure compliance with the current Ethical Standards of the [American Psychological Association \(APA\)](#), the [American Counseling Association \(ACA\)](#), and applicable [Florida law regarding the practice of Mental Health Counseling](#) and Psychology, no student may engage in any paid work of a psychological nature without the approval of the Counseling Program faculty. A student must provide a written proposal for such activity for faculty approval prior to accepting any such position.
- E. Each student is expected to maintain continuous enrollment in the program. A student may petition the Counseling Program faculty in writing for a leave of absence from the program. Such a leave of absence will normally be granted for one semester, but may be extended by the faculty for an additional semester upon written petition by the student. A student on a faculty approved leave of absence for more than *three consecutive semesters* must reapply to the University and to the Counseling Program Coordinator in order to reactivate his/her graduate student status, and shall be expected to meet requirements for graduation in effect at the time of readmission. A student who is not enrolled and is

not on a faculty approved leave of absence shall be considered to have voluntarily withdrawn from the program and must reapply for admission to the program along with other candidates for that year.

F. Each student is expected to complete the required Counseling Program Core Courses, which are listed in the SPBS Graduate Student Handbook and UWF catalog, while in residence as a student at UWF.

Faculty Advisor

Each student in the Counseling program will be assigned a Counseling faculty member as an advisor. It is the student's responsibility to schedule an appointment with his/her advisor prior to registration for the first semester courses. At that time, the advisor will discuss the training program and degree plan which will be placed in the student's file after it is signed by both student and advisor. The advisor will also discuss the statement to be signed by the student certifying that he/she has read and agrees to abide by Counseling Program, School of Psychological and Behavioral Sciences, and University policies.

The advisor's role is to serve as a mentor for the student throughout the course of the student's training. In this role, the advisor is available to the student for consultation and advice on any matters pertaining to the student's progress in the program. It is the advisor's responsibility to discuss the student's regular evaluation results with the student and authorize appropriate course registration in line with the student's degree plan. It is the student's responsibility to seek out his/her advisor for consultation and advice, and to schedule an appointment to discuss registration and evaluation each semester.

Performance Requirements

A. Academic Performance. A high level of academic performance is expected at the graduate level. Each student is required to maintain a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 3.0.

B. Professional Conduct. Each student's behavior, including but not limited to, interactions with university faculty, staff, and students, as well as practicum and internship supervisors, staff, and clients shall reflect a level of personal maturity, emotional stability, and professional integrity consistent with conduct in the professional community. Each student is expected to be familiar with and adhere to the current ethical standards of the relevant professional association (e.g. American Psychological Association (APA), American Counseling Association (ACA)). In addition, each student is expected to adhere to the standards for professional conduct that have been established for mental health professionals by Florida statute and regulations developed by the relevant state agency (e.g., Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA), the Department of Children and Families (DCF)). These standards shall include the relevant sections of Chapter 491; Chapter 490; Chapter 394, Part I; Chapter 415; and/or Florida Statute 090.503. (These standards will be covered at length in the Ethics course)

C. Clinical Skill. Each student is expected to demonstrate satisfactory progress in acquisition of applied skills at a consistent rate to meet at least minimum performance standards for a student at his/her level of training (e.g., Practicum and Internship in 2nd year). Minimum performance standards shall be established and periodically reviewed by Counseling Program faculty in the context of average level of performance of current and recent students in the following areas:

- 1) Clinical Assessment
- 2) Clinical Intervention
- 3) Consultation and Written Communication
- 4) Application/Integration of Clinical/Scientific Knowledge

Performance Evaluation

Given the nature of the practice of mental health counseling as an academically based profession, the Counseling Program faculty has a responsibility to promote and assure minimum standards of excellence for students in the training program. The school does not assume responsibility for the regulation of this profession, nor for the administration of mental health programs. However, the school recognizes its responsibility to establish and maintain a training program which is consistent with the standards set forth by the Florida Department of Health. For master's level mental health professionals, the Florida Board of Clinical Social Work, Marriage & Family Therapy & Mental Health Counseling is the relevant guiding body. (http://www.doh.state.fl.us/MQA/491/soc_applicant.html).

Each student seeking a graduate degree shall be evaluated at regular intervals in the 3 areas of performance requirements (academic performance, professional conduct, and clinical skill) to document progress and/or identify areas of difficulty for the student. Each student's performance in these 3 areas will be evaluated according to minimum expectations for the student's level of training, as determined by the faculty. Blank evaluation forms and performance criteria are available to students and each student is encouraged to discuss these with his/her advisor, practicum/internship supervisors, and other faculty as needed (Appendix B).

It is recognized that problems in a student's academic, professional, and personal conduct can take many forms, and that there are many demands and stresses involved in graduate study. The following evaluation procedures are established in recognition that each student deserves direct and immediate feedback on his/her progress toward achievement of the goal of graduation. For the successful student, regular evaluation will provide support and encouragement to continue his/her good work. For the student having temporary difficulty, regular evaluation will provide early identification of problems along with support and encouragement for resolving those problems in a timely fashion. For the student with significant, long-term difficulties, regular evaluation will provide support and encouragement for recognizing problems which cannot be resolved and for consideration of alternate career options.

Formal evaluation of each student shall take place at the end of each semester, with a written evaluation summary provided to the student by his/her advisor. The student shall be offered the opportunity to respond to the evaluation in writing and this response shall be attached to the evaluation placed in the student's file. Whether a written response is offered or not, the student shall acknowledge, by signature on the evaluation, having read the evaluation. The student is encouraged to discuss the evaluation with their advisor.

Each formal evaluation shall include a decision by the faculty to issue a recommendation for one of several options, as follows:

- 1) Commendation of Honor: The faculty may elect to formally recognize a student for performance that exceeds expectations and represents excellence in the profession, relative to the minimum expectations for the student's level of training.
- 2) Continuation in Program: The faculty may recommend continuation in the program for a student who demonstrates satisfactory performance, represented by meeting expectations in all areas evaluated.
- 3) Continuation, With Remedial Action: The faculty may recommend continuation in the program, but with specific recommendations for remedial action to be taken by the student who demonstrates satisfactory performance in most areas evaluated, but is also found to be below expectations in one area evaluated. Such remedial action is intended to assist the student in correcting the area of deficiency and is expected to be completed by the next regular evaluation. This recommendation shall include a notice to the student of the potential for being placed on probation or dismissed from the program if the remedial action is not successfully completed (Appendix C).
- 4) Probation: The faculty may recommend probation in any of the following circumstances:
 - a) for a student whose performance in more than one area is found to be below expectations, or whose performance in one or more areas is evaluated as being significantly below expectations,
 - b) for a student who fails to successfully complete a previously recommended remedial action,
 - c) for a student under investigation for alleged violation of APA or ACA ethical standards, until the conclusion of the investigation,
 - d) for a student under investigation for alleged violation of Florida statutes which would normally result in restriction from professional activities as a mental health professional, until the conclusion of the investigation,
 - e) for a student under investigation for alleged violation of the UWF Student Conduct System, until the conclusion of the investigation.

The recommendation for probation shall be in relation to the Counseling Program only, and shall be separate from and/or in addition to academic probation imposed by the university. The recommendation for probation shall include specific conditions of the probationary period as well as a remedial action plan intended to assist the student in correcting the area(s) of deficiency. The recommendation for probation shall also include a notice to the student of the potential for being dismissed from the program if the conditions of the probation are not honored and/or if the remedial action plan is not successfully completed (Appendix D). A student on probation must submit a written request for removal from probation to the Counseling Program faculty to consider at the next regular evaluation. Removal from probation and reinstatement in the program requires action by the Counseling faculty upon interview with the student and review of the student's successful completion of the conditions of probation and the remedial action plan.

5) **Dismissal:** The faculty may recommend dismissal from the program for a student who consistently fails to demonstrate adequate progress in any one or more of the areas evaluated, or for a student who fails to successfully complete recommended remedial plans. In these instances, dismissal is intended to be the final step taken after repeated efforts to assist the student in meeting minimal expectations have failed or been rejected by the student.

Dismissal from the program, without any prior recommendation for remedial action or probation, may also be recommended under the following circumstances:

- a) Serious violation of APA or ACA ethical standards,
- b) Violation of Florida Statutes which would normally result in restriction from professional activities as a mental health professional, or
- c) Serious misconduct in violation of the UWF Student Conduct System.

Due Process

Due process ensures that student evaluations and faculty decisions regarding students are not arbitrary, discriminatory, personally biased, or otherwise unfair. Upon admission to the graduate training program, each student is provided a copy of evaluation procedures and criteria in this policy document. Each student is provided online access to the School of Psychological and Behavioral Sciences Graduate Student Handbook and to the UWF Student Handbook, which outline the appropriate appeal procedures available to the student. A student who is dissatisfied with the content or outcome of an evaluation is encouraged to attach a written response to the evaluation. The student is also encouraged to attempt to resolve his/her concerns through discussion with the faculty advisor and/or Counseling Program Coordinator. If this process does not yield a satisfactory outcome, the student is encouraged to follow the Student Grievance System as described in the UWF Student Handbook.

Recommendation for Placement in Practicum / Internship Field Settings

Placement in a practicum usually represents the student's first step out of the role of student into the role of a mental health professional under supervision. As a student, one has responsibility primarily for oneself, to learn and make the most of the educational opportunities afforded by the university. In taking this first step into a professional role, the practicum student assumes several additional responsibilities. The first is the responsibility for representing the Counseling Program, School of Psychological and Behavioral Sciences, and the university in the professional community. The second is the student's responsibility to the field placement site, to be a responsible staff member and colleague. The third, and arguably the most important, is the student's responsibility to the clients to whom he/she will be providing mental health care. Because of these factors and others, many field placement sites used in the training program require background checks of prospective student interns.

Given these additional responsibilities, placement in a practicum is an important milestone in the student's training. The Counseling Program faculty bears additional responsibility for assuring that the student is adequately prepared prior to being permitted to take this step. Thus, the decision to authorize a

student to apply for a practicum position and register for practicum hours requires careful consideration of the student's previous performance in the training program.

In order to apply for permission to begin practicum, the student must successfully complete specific courses listed as pre-requisites for practicum. Thus, a student ordinarily will not apply for permission to begin practicum until *at least* the 5th semester in the program. Typically, students begin practicum during their second summer in the program. No student who is currently on a recommendation for remedial action or on probation will be permitted to apply. Thus, the student's most recent evaluation must have resulted in either a recommendation for commendation or a recommendation for continuation without any remedial action. In effect, the student's most recent evaluation must clearly indicate a level of performance in all 3 areas evaluated (academic, professional conduct, clinical skill), that is consistent with that of the average student in the program entering the applied practicum stage of graduate training.

Practicum Placement

Upon receiving authorization from the Counseling Program faculty to apply for a practicum position and register for practicum hours, the student should review the authorized practicum placement sites to determine which sites will be most likely to meet his/her training needs. Ordinarily, application for practicum takes place as part of the Counseling Program core course, Pre-practicum: Techniques of Counseling and Psychotherapy (PCO 6204).

Ordinarily, a student will not be placed for practicum in an agency where the student is already employed. Exceptions will be considered if the practicum placement is within a program that is administratively distinct from the student's employment and if the practicum supervisor is not the student's employment supervisor. Employment in the practicum site agency which would commence after the start of the practicum may be considered on a case by case basis, if the above criteria for distinct program and supervisor are met.

Practicum Requirements

The expectation is that the practicum student will spend a minimum of 10 hours per week, but typically no more than 15 hours per week at the practicum site performing counseling training duties assigned by the supervisor at the practicum site. These will include conducting counseling sessions with clients of the agency, participating in case conferences and meetings at the agency, participating in regular supervision sessions with the on-site supervisor, and completing any record keeping and case management duties required in a responsible, professional, and timely fashion. Under normal circumstances, the time spent at the practicum site should involve at least half of the time devoted to direct client contact. In addition, the practicum student will be expected to attend the 3 hour, scheduled practicum class meeting each week. An essential component of the practicum class is the regularly scheduled individual supervision with the course instructor, in addition to the class meeting. Over the course of the semester, these components of the practicum experience will provide the student with a minimum of 150 hours of on-site training in addition to the university-based supervision and class. Successful completion of the practicum will be determined by the grade received for the course, based on the evaluation of the on-site practicum supervisor and the course instructor.

Internship

The process for completing the requirements for the internship is similar to, and follows in sequence, the completion of the requirements for the practicum experience. The student must, in conjunction with the Counseling Program faculty, be cleared to continue training in an internship position (almost always in the same setting as the practicum), and register for internship credit hours. In order to obtain permission to begin internship, a student must have successfully completed Practicum. No student who is currently on a recommendation for remedial action or on probation will be permitted to begin internship. Thus, the student's most recent evaluation must have resulted in either a recommendation for commendation or a recommendation for continuation without any remedial action. In effect, the student's most recent evaluation must clearly indicate a level of performance in all 3 areas evaluated (academic, professional conduct, clinical skill), that is consistent with that of the average student in the program nearing the end of his/her graduate training.

For students in the licensure degree option, a minimum of 850 on-site hours are required to fulfill the requirements for the internship. Internship is usually a full-time placement, the equivalent of 28-40 hours per week across two semesters. Under some circumstances, a part-time placement over a longer period of time may be approved by the faculty. Licensure students are responsible for creating an internship committee (2 faculty, Chair must be from the Counseling Program) near the end of their practicum training, or at the very beginning of their first internship semester, that will assist in creating an Integrative Paper which shall be defended near the end of their training. The Integrative Paper should be comprised of no more than 35-40 pages of text, in addition to references and appendices.

For students in the thesis degree option, a minimum of 300 on-site hours are required to fulfill the requirements for the internship. Thus, the placement will comprise twice as many hours as the placement for the practicum.

Appendix A

**CERTIFICATION OF ADMISSION AND AGREEMENT
TO ABIDE BY COUNSELING PROGRAM POLICIES**

Student Name: _____

Semester of Admission: _____

I understand that, as a graduate student, I have certain rights, privileges, and responsibilities, as do the faculty, which are described in the Counseling Program's Graduate Student Policy. In accepting admission to the Graduate Program in Counseling in the School of Psychological and Behavioral Sciences, I certify that I have received, read, and agree to abide by the provisions of the Graduate Student Policy for the Counseling Program, the School of Psychological and Behavioral Sciences Student Handbook, and the UWF Student Handbook (available online).

Student Signature

Date

Faculty Advisor or Program Coordinator

Date

Appendix B

STUDENT EVALUATION - COUNSELING PROGRAM

Through the course of graduate training, the student is expected to demonstrate progress in each of three areas: Academic Performance, Professional Conduct, and Clinical Skill. Evaluation of the student in these three primary areas of performance is based on expectations for a student at his/her particular level of training. For example, expectations in the area of clinical skill will be quite different for a student in his/her final semester, than for a student in his/her first semester. Thus, a level of performance that merits a rating of satisfactory or even excellent for a first year student will likely merit an unsatisfactory rating for a second year student. In this context, student evaluations are based on the following scale:

I. **Below Expectations:** The student's performance represents a significant problem that requires a disproportionate amount of attention by faculty and/or supervisor(s). Performance is below expected level to the extent that a plan for remedial action is necessary to improve the student's performance to achieve a minimally acceptable level.

II. **Expected Level:** Three subcategories at this level.

1) **Needs Attention:** Student's performance represents only a minimally acceptable level of performance that is not a major problem requiring remedial action. However, it is an issue of concern that requires additional effort by student and faculty to improve the student's performance to an expected or satisfactory level.

2) **Satisfactory:** Student's performance represents solid, good work at the level expected for his/her level of training.

3) **Very Good:** Student's performance represents a high level of performance at the upper end of the expected level.

III. **Above Expectations:** The student's performance represents outstanding achievement of a level of performance that is well above what would be expected for his/her level of training. This represents exceptional performance that merits commendation of honor.

Evaluation of each area should include a brief description of specific information that supports and illustrates this rating. Finally, one or more goals for the student to work toward in each area should be described. In the event of a rating below expected level, the goal shall consist of the remedial action plan recommended by the faculty.

Appendix B (cont.)

STUDENT EVALUATION - COUNSELING PROGRAM

Student Name: _____
Prepared By: _____
Date: _____

A. Academic Performance. A high level of academic performance is expected at the graduate level. Each student is required to maintain a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 3.0.

Comments: Above Expectations:____ Meets Expectations____ Below Expectations____

Goals:

B. Professional Conduct. Each student's behavior, including but not limited to, interactions with university faculty, staff, and students, as well as practicum and internship supervisors, staff, and clients shall reflect a level of personal maturity, emotional stability, and professional integrity consistent with conduct in the professional community.

Comments: Above Expectations:____ Meets Expectations____ Below Expectations____

Goals:

C. Clinical Skill. Each student is expected to demonstrate satisfactory progress in acquisition of applied skills at a consistent rate to meet at least minimum performance standards for a student at his/her level of training (e.g. 1st year, 2nd year, etc.).

Comments: Above Expectations:____ Meets Expectations____ Below Expectations____ N/A____

Goals:

OVERALL PROGRESS:

- 1) Commendation of Honor _____
- 2) Continuation in Program _____
- 3) Continuation, With Remedial Action _____
- 4) Probation _____
- 5) Dismissal _____

Please sign and date this form indicating that you have read your evaluation and have been encouraged to discuss it with your advisor.

Student Signature/Date

Appendix C

REMEDIAL ACTION PLAN

Student Name: _____

Date: _____

The following remedial action plan is intended to help the student address an area of performance that has been evaluated as being below expected level for the student's current level of training. This remedial action plan is regarded as being a required component of the student's training program, which must be successfully completed before the student can advance within the program. Failure to honor or successfully complete this plan may result in the student being placed on probation or even dismissed from the program, according to the Graduate Student Policy.

Area and Nature of Deficiency:

Remedial Action and Criteria for Completion:

Recommended Time for Completion:

Faculty Advisor Signature/Date

Student Signature/Date

Counseling Program Coordinator/Date

Appendix D

RECOMMENDATION FOR PROBATION

Student Name: _____

Date: _____

This Recommendation for Probation is intended to help the student address one or more areas of performance that have been evaluated as being below expected level for the student's current level of training or as representing a significant impediment to the student's successful completion of the training program. This probation status is regarded as being a temporary suspension of the student's training program. The conditions of probation must be successfully fulfilled before the student will be permitted to advance within the program. Failure to honor or successfully fulfill the conditions of probation may result in the student being dismissed from the program, according to the Graduate Student Policy.

Cause for Probation:

Conditions of Probation and Criteria for Completion:

Recommended Time for Completion:

Faculty Advisor Signature/Date

Student Signature/Date

Counseling Program Coordinator/Date