Approved Spring 2025

Fitness to Practice for the School Counseling and Clinical Mental Health Specializations UTRGV Department of Counseling

This Fitness to Practice policy applies to all students upon enrollment in the Clinical Mental Health or School Counseling specialization (Counseling Program) and remains in effect until program completion. Satisfying the curriculum requirements is not sufficient for completion of the Counseling Program. In addition to satisfactory completion of the academic requirements and standards of the UTRGV Graduate School (delineated in the Graduate Catalog), all students are expected to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions sufficient to provide mental health services in clinical mental health and school settings. Satisfactory progress in the Counseling Program is a result of successful completion of university coursework and the demonstration of important characteristics and professional dispositions identified below in the Fitness to Practice Professional Dispositional Inventory. The Counseling Program Principles guide these professional dispositions, which are based on the counseling profession's values and reflect goals for those graduating from the Counseling Program. Because of the nature of the services provided by Clinical Mental Health or School Counselors, program faculty reserve the right to recommend or not recommend students' continuation in the program based on whether students demonstrate Fitness to Practice skills and professional dispositions.

In addition to meeting the academic standards set forth by the UTRGV Graduate College, counseling students are expected to conduct themselves in an ethical, responsible, and professional manner. They must be knowledgeable of and at all times adhere to the general standards of professional ethics and practice set forth by the American Counseling Association (ACA), and the additional standards set forth for professional practice in specific settings (e.g., American Mental Health Counselors Association-AMHCA), American School Counselor Association (ASCA), the International Association of Marriage and Family Counselors-IAMFT), and the Association for Specialists in Group Work (ASGW). The general and specific ACA standards for ethical practice of counseling are listed on the American Counseling Association (ACA) website. Further, students in the Clinical Mental Health Counseling program must adhere to the requirements of the Texas State Board of Examiners of Licensed Professional Counselors, and students in the School Counseling specialization must adhere to the requirements in the Texas Administrative Code [Title 19, Part 7, Chapter 239, Rule 239.15]These codes were developed to protect the client, the student, and the counselor. At the outset of their academic program and in the new student orientation, counseling students are directed to review these standards and seek any clarification needed from their respective academic advisors.

As future professional counselors, the faculty members expect students to be concerned about other people, to be stable and psychologically well adjusted (personally and professionally), to be capable of effective interpersonal relationships, to be able to receive and apply feedback willingly, and to give feedback constructively (American Counseling Association Code of Ethics, 2014). Further, students are expected to behave generally in a manner that demonstrates fitness for a role in the helping professions. Finally, we expect students to be committed to continued personal growth and professional development and to demonstrate that commitment through self-reflection and responsiveness to supervision in all activities related to their degree program.

For all the reasons cited above, the faculty will regularly monitor not only students' academic progress through coursework but also fitness to practice professional dispositions that will affect their performance in the counseling profession. The assessment of these dispositions and skills necessarily involves program faculty members' professional judgment. When a student's academic or professional progress does not meet program standards, faculty will undertake procedures for remediation to support development, retention, personal growth, and/or dismissal from the program, if warranted. The policy, practices, and procedures below are consistent with UTRGV's Academic Policies and Procedures as well as counseling ethical codes (e.g., ACA, ASCA) and standards of counseling practice (Texas Educators, Title 19, Texas Administrative Code, Rule 247.2).

A. Counseling Program Principles

- Principle A: Commitment to Self-Reflection (Garner et al., 2020)
- Principle B: Commitment to Personal Wellness (Miller et al., 2020)
- Principle C: Commitment to Responsiveness to Supervision and Feedback (American Counseling Association, 2014; American School Counselor Association, 2022)
- Principle D: Commitment to Client Care (American Counseling Association, 2014)

B. Essential Professional Practice Dispositions

- Academic Skills
    - Professional Counseling Orientation and Ethical Practice
    - Social and Cultural Identities and Experiences
    - Lifespan Development
    - Career Development
    - Counseling Practice and Helping Relationships
    - Group Counseling and Group Work
    - Assessment and Diagnostic Purposes
    - Research and Program Evaluation
- Clinical Skills
- Professional Conduct
- Interpersonal Skills

C. Essential Abilities

The ability to perform the following essential functions, with or without reasonable accommodations, is required:

a. Observation: Counseling students must be able to accurately observe demonstrations and students or clients close at hand and at a distance to learn skills and to gather their student's or client's data.

b .Communication: Counseling students must be able to communicate orally and in writing. They also must be able to read and comprehend written material.

c. Psychomotor Skills: Counseling students must exhibit motor and sensory abilities to attend and participate in class and practicum or internship placements.

d .Intellectual and Cognitive Abilities: Counseling students must be able to measure, calculate, reason, analyze, synthesize, integrate, and apply information.
e. Behavioral and Social Attributes: Counseling students must possess the emotional health required to fully use their intellectual abilities, such as exercising sound judgment, and developing mature, sensitive, and effective relationships with others such as their clients, client's parents, colleagues, and professors. Counseling students must possess the ability to function effectively under stress, adapt to changing environments, and display flexibility.
f. Application of Ethical Standards: Counseling students must demonstrate professional demeanor and behavior and must perform in an ethical manner in dealings with others.

G. Accommodations. *An individual with a disability who requests a reasonable accommodation must initiate a request by contacting the Office of Student Accessibility Services. Accommodations will be provided in accordance with University policy, UTRGV Handbook of Operating Procedures, ADM 03-200.*

D. Fitness to Practice Criteria

Counseling students are evaluated throughout their enrollment in the program using criteria of student achievement and professional dispositions (see page 9) that have been set to measure students' professional development as it relates to their professional competence as well as interpersonal and intrapersonal functioning. These criteria are defined as the following five (5) areas of professional and personal performance standards (American Counseling Association, 2014; American School Counseling Association, 2022; Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, 2024; Center for Credentialing and Education, 2024; Garner et al., 2020; Miller et al., 2020):

1. Academic Skills (CACREP, 2024; CPCE, 2024): Students will
    a. Complete assignments as outlined in the course syllabus that are aligned with CACREP 2024 standards and CPCE core content areas
    b. Actively participate in class discussions.
    c. Demonstrate academic potential.
    d. Submit quality of work.
    e. Be punctual and present for class.
    f. Develop presentation skills.
    g. Develop professional writing skills including American Psychological Association format.
2. Clinical Skills and Treatment Planning (Garner et al., 2020; Miller et al., 2020): Students will develop knowledge and skills in
    a. Self-care and personal wellness strategies
    b. Understanding and application of counseling theories
    c. Assessment
    d. Case conceptualization
    e. Record keeping
3. Ethical Conduct (American Counseling Association, 2014): Students will
    a. Adhere to professional codes

b. Demonstrate academic honesty (e.g., use of AI)

4. Professional Conduct (Miller et al., 2020): Students will

    a. Develop a professional counseling identity
    b. Develop a counseling theoretical orientation
    c. Maintain professionalism at conference presentations
    d. Maintain professional communication with peers and professors

5. Interpersonal Skills (Garner et al., 2020; Miller et al., 2020): Students will demonstrate knowledge and skills in the following:

    a. Emotional stability
    b. Collaboration
    c. Assertiveness
    d. Maturity
    e. Respect for diversity
    f. Motivation
    g. Flexibility
    h. Caring
    i. Professional/personal balance
    j. Self-examination
    k. Being receptive to feedback
    l. Incorporating feedback
    m. Appropriate boundaries

E. Assessment of Professional Dispositions and Dispositional Review Procedures

1. Upon acceptance to the program, students will be apprised of the required professional dispositions.
2. Students will acknowledge and electronically sign the Fitness to Practice Policy in Watermark SL&L and retain one copy for their own records. The signed acknowledgement forms will be stored in TK20. Students will also acknowledge and sign the Educator Preparation Program Exit Policy.
3. Throughout each course, full- and part-time faculty will document student behavior that deviates from dispositions using the Fitness to Practice Professional Dispositional inventory.
4. The Fitness to Practice Professional Dispositional Inventory is conducted at the end of each semester by all program and part-time faculty. The results are reported and discussed at a bi-annual (fall and spring) faculty meeting. If any concerns arise aligned with levels of review below, the academic advisor will contact the student to address the concern.
5. Student dispositions occurring during the summer semesters will be documented by the instructor of record, staff, clinic supervisors, or site supervisors and reported to the student's academic advisor. The counseling department chair and graduate program coordinator will also be copied on the email. The academic advisor will contact the student at the start of the Fall semester to address the concern. The academic advisor and instructor of record will complete the fitness to practice professional dispositional form together and present it to the student.

F. Retention, Remediation, and Dismissal Policy

The purpose of our retention, remediation, and dismissal policy is to support students as well as gatekeeping in the counseling profession. Faculty members, staff, clinic supervisors, and/or site supervisors use the Fitness to Practice Professional Dispositional Inventory in every course or at any time for students who knowingly engage in illegal, unprofessional, or unethical activities or for students whose professional performance is deemed to present an immediate threat to the well-being of others. In such cases and depending upon the level of perceived threat, we would skip most steps below and go straight to Level 2 that includes a faculty retention committee. The level of review will depend on factors such as the nature, severity, and frequency of the incident or concern. For example, repeated violations or severe unprofessional behavior may result in immediate Formal Level 2 Review. The procedures below were designed to support students' development, retention, and growth.

Levels of Review

1. Informal Review. An informal review involves a meeting between a student and their academic advisor. When a faculty member expresses concerns (e.g., student struggles with punctuality) for the first time about a student and assigns a rating of 0 on students' fitness to practice dispositions, an informal review protocol is initiated. The faculty member/academic advisor must take steps a-c below. Step d may be necessary in extreme cases.
    a. Discuss the concerns directly with the student within 7 business days of the initial concern and seek to work with the student to improve their fitness to practice.
    b. Document the concerns in writing and advise the Graduate Program Coordinator and Department Chair of the concern(s) to identify potential patterns.
    c. Document dates and content of meetings with students using the Fitness to Practice Review Form (see page 12) and provide a copy of the signed form to the Graduate Program Coordinator and Department Chair.
    d. Initiate Level 1 or Level 2 protocol if the concern warrants it (e.g., severe unprofessional behavior).
2. Formal Review (Level 1). A Level 1 Formal Review is initiated when the student receives a rating of 0 on fitness to practice professional dispositions on two separate occasions or faculty members believe that a student could benefit from completing a remediation plan to improve fitness to practice. It is important to note that if faculty members express significant concerns on an important professional disposition (e.g., student has not demonstrated clinical skills), they can recommend a Level 2 review even if there has only been one incident. The following steps must be implemented for a Formal Level 1 Review:

a) The academic advisor contacts the student to set up a meeting to discuss fitness to practice concerns. The Fitness to Practice Professional Dispositional Inventory is conducted at the end of each semester by all program and part-time faculty. The results are reported and discussed at a bi-annual (fall and spring) faculty meeting. Therefore, the academic advisor will be aware of the fitness-to-practice concern. The student must respond within 7 business days of the notification. If the student does not respond within the timeframe, then a Level 2 review is initiated.
b) The academic advisor meets with the student and collaborates on constructing a remediation plan. The student will have 7 business days to review, sign, and return the remediation plan to the academic advisor. Copies of the remediation plan will be kept in the student's file. The academic advisor will then notify the Graduate Program Coordinator and Department Chair regarding the meeting with the student and the proposed remediation plan with a timeline to complete activities.
c) The student will submit the remediation plan within the agreed upon timeframe to their academic advisor. If the academic advisor determines that all stipulations in the remediation plan have been met, no further action is required. The academic advisor notifies the Graduate Program Coordinator and Department Chair. However, if the student does not meet the stipulations set forth in their remediation plan or receives a rating of 0 on a fitness to practice professional disposition in another academic semester, they would need to be reviewed by a faculty retention committee as part of a Level 2 Review.

3. Formal Review (Level 2). A Level 2 Review is initiated in the following ways: (1) faculty members, site supervisors, clinic supervisors, or staff have expressed significant concerns on a professional disposition and given a rating of 0 on a student's fitness to practice dispositions on three separate occasions; (2) faculty members, clinic supervisors, site supervisors, or staff believe that a student has engaged in unprofessional behavior that warrants a Level 2 Review; or (3) a student has not fulfilled their remediation plan under the Level 1 Review. When a level 2 review protocol is initiated, the following steps must be implemented:

    1. The Faculty Retention Committee will hear the student's case. The Faculty Retention Committee consists of three full-time faculty members in the department of counseling elected by full-time faculty. The Faculty Retention committee will determine whether the student's matter should be referred to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities (SSR) for review under the applicable University policies. Also, the department chair will not participate in a level 2 review.
    2. The chair of the Faculty Retention Committee will email the student letting them know about the Level 2 violation and to schedule a meeting. The student must respond within 7 business days (excluding holidays) of receiving the notification.
    3. The student may appear in person (or zoom) before the Faculty Retention Committee and present evidence. No person other than the student and faculty retention committee members may be present.

4. After the Faculty Retention Committee has heard the evidence, they will decide a course of action for the student.

G. Appeals and Procedures Subsequent to Request for Dismissal

Following the review of information at the Faculty Retention Committee meeting, the Committee must decide and report to the student that the student: (1) should be allowed to remain in the program with or without conditions or (2) should be dismissed from the program, immediately dropped from enrollment in current courses, and prevented from enrolling in subsequent courses. The Faculty Retention Committee decision will be written and emailed to the student within 7 business days of the close of the hearing. The committee will copy the Academic Advisor, Graduate Program Coordinator, Department Chair, and CEP Associate Dean for Graduate Studies.

1. If the student is not satisfied with the Faculty Retention Committee's decision, the Department Chair will consider the matter and based on information submitted by the Faculty Retention Committee, the Department Chair may meet with the Faculty Retention Committee and/or with the student. The Department Chair will render their decision and send to the student within 7 business days (excluding holidays) of receiving the appeal. If the student is not satisfied with the Department Chair's decision, they can appeal to the Educator Preparation Committee (EPC) in the College of Education and P-16 Integration. We will follow the CEP Educator Preparation Program Exit policy for general dismissal.
2. The EPC will consider the matter based on information submitted by the Faculty Retention Committee. The EPC will render their decision and send to the student within 7 business days (excluding holidays) of receiving the appeal. If the student is not satisfied with the EPC's decision, they can appeal to the Dean in the College of Education and P-16 Integration
3. A dismissed student may dispute the decision of the EPC by appealing to the CEP Dean whose decision is final. The dismissed student must file a written appeal to the Dean within five (5) business days of receipt of the EPC's written decision. The student's appeal must include a justification statement for appeal and all documentation provided by the student to the EPC. Within fifteen (15) business days from receipt of the student's appeal, the Dean will provide a written decision to the student and the EPC Chair. The decision of the Dean is the final appellate review.

Acknowledgment of Fitness to Practice and EPP Exit Policy

I, _____have read The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Department of Counseling Fitness to Practice and the EPP Exit Policy. I understand that my enrollment status in the Department of Counseling is based on my ability to continue to satisfy all academic program requirements and fitness to practice professional dispositions.

Signature: Date:

Instructions for the Fitness to Practice Professional Dispositional Inventory

Rating Legend

N - No Opportunity to observe
0 - Does not meet criteria for program level
1 - Meets criteria below minimal requirements or inconsistently for program level
2 - Meets minimum requirements for program level
3 - Performs above minimum requirements in a satisfactory manner

Academic Skills

Criteria	N	0	1	2	3
The student completes assignments as outlined in the course syllabus.					
The student actively participates in class discussion.					
Student demonstrates academic potential					
The student submits work of quality.					
The student is punctual and present for class as outlined in the course syllabus.					
The student demonstrates professional presentation skills.					
The student demonstrates professional writing skills using APA format.					

Clinical Skills and Treatment Planning

Criteria	N	0	1	2	3
Skills I (6313, 6310) Student completes self-care strategies appropriate to the counselor role; Student demonstrates strategies for personal and professional self-evaluation and implications for practice; Student demonstrates advocacy processes needed to address institutional and social barriers that impede access, equity, and success for clients.					
Skills II (6328) Student demonstrates an understanding of theory studied in this course through completion of a theoretical orientation paper; Student applies techniques of therapy for the theories studied in this course and demonstrates case conceptualization skills through completion of a final recording.					
Skills III (6365-70) The student demonstrates the capacity to match appropriate interventions to the presenting clinical profile in a theoretically consistent manner. ASSESSMENT					
The student demonstrates an understanding of the primary elements of the client's story (content), as well as the uniqueness of the story elements and their underlying meaning (context). CASE CONCEPTUALIZATION					
The student maintains appropriate case notes for client records and does so in a timely manner. RECORD KEEPING					

Ethical Conduct

Criteria	N	0	1	2	3
The student relates to peers, professors, and others in a manner consistent with stated professional standards. ADHERES TO PROFESSIONAL CODES	N	0	1	2	3
The student demonstrates academic honesty as outlined by the UTRGV Academic Integrity Guidelines. ACADEMIC HONESTY					

Professional Conduct

Criteria	N	0	1	2	3
The student conducts self in an ethical manner so as to promote confidence in the counseling profession. PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY					
The student demonstrates the capacity to match appropriate interventions to the presenting clinical profile. THEORETICAL ORIENTATION					
The student presents him/herself in a professional manner at conference presentations and professional settings Maintain professional communication and interactions with peers and professors					

Interpersonal Skills

Criteria	N	0	1	2	3
The student demonstrates appropriate self-control (such as anger control, impulse control) in interpersonal relationships with faculty, peers, and clients. EMOTIONAL STABILITY					
The student works well with faculty, peers, and clients. COLLABORATION					
The student follows professionally recognized problem solving processes, seeking to informally solve problems first with the individual(s) with whom the problem exists. RESPECTFULLY ASSERTIVE					
The student exhibits appropriate levels of self-assurance, confidence and trust in own ability. MATURITY					
The student respects cultural, individual and role differences, including those due to age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language and socioeconomic status. RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY					
The student demonstrates having a sense of motivation. MOTIVATION					
The student demonstrates an ability to adapt to change. FLEXIBILITY					
The student respects the fundamental rights, dignity and worth of all people. CARING					
The student maintains appropriate balance between professional and personal roles. PROFESSIONAL/PERSONAL BALANCE					
The student is aware of his/her own belief systems, values, needs and limitations and the effect of these on his/her work. OPEN TO SELF-EXAMINATION					
The student demonstrates ability to receive feedback from peers, teachers and supervisors. RECEPTIVE TO FEEDBACK					
The student demonstrates ability to integrate and utilize feedback from peers, teachers and supervisors. INCORPORATES FEEDBACK					
The student demonstrates sensitivity to real and ascribed differences in power between themselves and others. APPROPRIATE BOUNDARIES					

Counseling Program Clinical Mental Health and School Counseling Specializations
Fitness to Practice Professional Dispositions Review
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Student Name: Student ID:

Semester/Year: Date:

This is to notify you that your professional performance has been evaluated according to the Fitness to Practice and Exit policy in the Department of Counseling.

Standard	Does not meet criteria for Program Level (0)	Meets Criteria Below minimal requirements for Program Level (1)	Meets Minimum Requirements Level (2)
1. Academic Skills	Level 0 ☐	Level 1 ☐	Level 2 ☐
2. Clinical Skills	Level 0 ☐	Level 1 ☐	Level 2 ☐
3. Ethical Conduct	Level 0 ☐	Level 1 ☐	Level 2 ☐
4. Professional Conduct	Level 0 ☐	Level 1 ☐	Level 2 ☐
5. Interpersonal Skills	Level 0 ☐	Level 1 ☐	Level 2 ☐

Levels of Review and Remediation Plan

Informal Review

Comments *(Reasons for Level of Review and Next Steps including timeline of proposed activities)*	Date	Was the issue resolved? (Yes or No)

Level 1

Comments *(Reasons for Level of Review and Next Steps including timeline of proposed activities)*	Date	Was the issue resolved? (Yes or No)

Level 2

Comments *(Reasons for Level of Review and Next Steps including timeline of proposed activities)*	Date	Was the issue resolved? (Yes or No)

Student (acknowledgement of evaluation) Faculty Member/Academic Advisor

Graduate Program Coordinator