

Goodness of Fit to Practice Counseling

Students are evaluated throughout their enrollment in the program using criteria of student achievement and limitations 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 four areas of professional and personal performance

standards:

1. Academic Skills
2. Clinical Skills
3. Ethical Conduct
4. Interpersonal Skills

The Goodness of Fit to Practice Counseling Assessment is conducted at the conclusion of each semester by all program faculty and adjunct faculty. Faculty are constantly monitoring and evaluating student progress and suitability for the field of counseling. Faculty make judgments as to students' progress based on the benchmarks listed in the student evaluation section of this handbook, and on the students' adherence to the ethical standards, certification, and licensure standards. These standards will be reflected in the grades assigned by faculty, periodic scheduled evaluations (benchmark points), and evaluation forms completed as part of field experience supervision by faculty and supervisor, and completion of the Goodness of Fit to Practice Counseling form.

Student Evaluation Timeline

Benchmark 1: Admissions Interview. All candidates must participate in an admissions interview with program faculty who will recommend candidates to enter into the program or deny admission. The Admissions Interview occurs prior to students' acceptance into the program.

Benchmark 2: Research Methods Proposal. Counseling graduate students will demonstrate understanding and knowledge of quantitative and/or qualitative research designs by preparing a research methods proposal in COUN 6301.

Benchmark 3: Theoretical Orientation. Counseling graduate students will demonstrate understanding, knowledge, and application of counseling theories based on understanding of theoretical content in order to inform treatment with diverse clients. Students will prepare a research paper in COUN 6328 describing their understanding of their preferred theoretical orientation while linking their understanding to a personal reflection

of their values and experiences and their ability to accept another individual in a professional helping relationship. Students enroll in COUN 6328 after completing a minimum of 12 semester credit hours.

Benchmark 4: School Counseling Program. Counseling graduate students will demonstrate knowledge, understanding, and application of school counseling programs through development of a comprehensive school counseling guidance program design and evaluation plan in COUN 6344.

Benchmark 5: Clinical Mental Health Counseling Skills. Counseling graduate students will demonstrate knowledge of techniques, interventions, and applications for prevention and treatment to work with diverse populations in various settings. Students will be assessed on their clinical skills in COUN 6365, COUN 6369, and COUN 6370 based on the Counseling Skills Scale (CSS; Eriksen & McAuliffe, 2003) and other assessment instruments. Students are approved for Practicum after completing all prerequisites, typically after 42 credit hours.

Benchmark 6: Goodness-of-Fit to Practice Evaluation. Program faculty will administer a Goodness-of-Fit to Practice Evaluation in a team meeting at the end of each semester for every student in the counseling program. The purpose is to assess students' academic and clinical skills, ethical conduct, professional conduct, and interpersonal skills. Those students who receive unsatisfactory ratings will undergo remediation according to faculty recommendations to successfully improve in the program. The Goodness-of-Fit evaluation occurs at the end of each semester.

Benchmark 7: Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Exam (CPCE). Counseling graduate students will demonstrate knowledge and proficiency in CACREP core counseling areas such as career development, human growth and development, social and cultural diversity, and assessment. Counseling graduate students must successfully pass the CPCE in order to graduate from the counseling and guidance program. The purpose of this examination is to assess students' knowledge of the same eight content areas as the National Counselor Examination (NCE), which is used by Texas as the licensing exam for counseling professionals. The CPCE serves as the Department of Counseling exit exam. Students in good academic standing are permitted to take the CPCE three times as long as they are enrolled in, or have completed COUN 6365: Practicum.

Benchmark 8: Professional Counseling Orientation and Identity. Counseling graduate students will demonstrate a strong professional counseling orientation and identity through membership in counseling organizations and attending and/or presenting at school, local, state, or national counseling conferences or seminars. Students will

write a reflection journal on their professional counseling orientation and identity as well as document membership and participation in professional organizations in COUN 6369 and COUN 6370.26

Appeals Process

Grade Appeal Process

Students wishing to appeal final grades or decisions regarding academic standards should first discuss the matter with the instructor of the class. If no resolution occurs, and the student wishes to pursue the matter further, the student may appeal in writing to the appropriate department chair within one long semester after the disputed grade or decision is issued. The department chair will respond in writing to the student within 14 calendar days (excluding holidays) of the receipt of the student's written appeal.

Subsequent appeals can be written and directed within 14 calendar days (excluding holidays) of the date of the department chair's decision to the school, college, and division College Academic Appeals Committee respectively. The Committee will consist of a panel of three faculty members, two of whom may not be from the department in which the appeal originated. The dean or director will appoint the panel members upon receipt of the written appeal and notify the student in writing of the date, time and location of the hearing and the names of the members of the panel. The student and the faculty member involved may appear in person before the panel and present evidence. The hearing will be closed to the public, and no person other than the student, the faculty member involved and panel members may be present. No person may represent the student or the faculty member.

After the College Academic Appeals Committee has heard the appeal, it will deliberate and come to a decision. The Committee's decision will be written and mailed, or delivered in person, to the student and faculty member within three class days of the close of the hearing. The student may appeal in writing within 14 calendar days to the dean/director (excluding holidays). The dean's/director's decision will be final, and it must be mailed or delivered in person to the student within 14 calendar days (excluding holidays) of the receipt of the student's written appeal. (Source: UTRGV Graduate Catalog, pg. 99.)

Goodness of Fit to Practice Appeal Process

Faculty will initiate the Goodness of Fit to Practice protocol 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, the combined faculty may recommend discontinuation in the program without opportunity for student

remediation. The procedures below apply in less egregious cases. In the event faculty members have reasonable cause to suspect a student has been engaged in unethical, unprofessional or illegal conduct, a student's right to due process is respected when the faculty members follow these procedures.

1. A "retention committee" of two faculty members (excluding any faculty member who initiated the procedure) is appointed by the Department Chair and conducts a preliminary investigation prior to confronting the individual suspected of the unacceptable conduct. Witnesses are interviewed and asked to sign statements. The Dean of the Graduate College is given informal notice of the proceedings at this point.²⁷
2. The retention committee delivers its report to the faculty and the faculty makes a decision to pursue or drop the line of inquiry.
3. If the faculty decides to pursue the line of inquiry, the student is immediately informed by the retention committee of the nature of the charges against him or her and is given a chance to respond.
4. The retention committee conducts further investigation and presents its report along with recommendations and/or requirements to the department faculty. When the faculty members have acted upon the committee's report, the Department Chair and the committee members meet with the student to convey verbally and in writing the department's decision and/or recommendations which in extreme cases may be a recommendation to the student to withdraw or to the Dean of the Graduate College for dismissal.
5. If the student is not satisfied with the recommendation of the faculty, he or she can choose to initiate the appeals and grievance process at the Graduate College.
6. The committee will subsequently monitor the student's progress in carrying out the program's requirements, if any.
7. Failure to comply with the requirements or evidence of further misconduct will result in additional disciplinary action up to, and including, recommendation for dismissal.

Process for Retention, Remediation, and Dismissal

Student evaluation is an ongoing process that is conducted in informal and formal manners. If a student is deemed at risk in terms of failure due to academic skills deficits, professional skills deficits, or personal issues that interfere with the ability to function in the role of a professional counselor, faculty will engage in a systematic process to address the concerns.

Level 1

Discuss between faculty member and student to address the concerns. Faculty members complete Student Evaluation Scale every semester on all students enrolled in their courses.

Level 2

Faculty member consults with other faculty during faculty meeting and alerts them to the concerns. Documentation is included in the faculty meeting minutes.

Level 3

Upon the third consultation in faculty meetings or at any time in which the concern is deemed significant, the faculty advisor requests a meeting with the student to create a professional development plan. The student will be required to set goals and identify means for achieving those goals. A follow up meeting will be scheduled to monitor progress toward goals.

Level 4

A formal remediation plan will be developed and implemented at any time in which the concern is deemed egregious. Remediation can involve repeating classes, other required professional development activities, and attending personal counseling. The entire program faculty will develop the goals for the plan, identify the required target measures of accomplishment and documentation of goal attainment, and the timeframe for completion. Students who are mandated to attend personal counseling will be required to sign a release of information that will allow the faculty to obtain information about the number of sessions attended, willingness to address the identified concerns, and progress toward the identified goals. Personal information will not be shared with the faculty. Failure to complete the remediation plan will result in removal from the program.²⁸

Level 5

If the student has failed to respond appropriately to the previous levels or has committed a serious breach of professional ethics, dismissal from the program will occur.

Remediation and Dismissal Appeal Process

A student may appeal a remediation or dismissal decision by filing a written appeal with the Department Chair within ten working days of receipt of the decision. If the student is dissatisfied with the Department Chair's decision, the student may file a written appeal with the Dean of the Graduate College within ten working days of receipt of the Department chair's decision. The decision of the Dean of the Graduate College is final. A student appealing a dismissal decision may remain in classes until any appeals have been completed.