

MASTER'S IN PSYCHOLOGY AND COUNSELING ACCREDITATION COUNCIL  
(MPCAC)

ACCREDITATION MANUAL

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## FOREWORD

The Master's in Psychology and Counseling Accreditation Council (MPCAC) Accreditation Manual presents the MPCAC Accreditation Standards. These standards shall be the basis for MPCAC accreditation decisions.

### SCOPE

MPCAC accredits counseling and psychology master's degree programs, located in regionally accredited colleges and universities in the United States, that educate students in the science-based practice of counseling and psychological services.

### MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the MPCAC is to accredit academic programs that provide science-based education and training in the practice of counseling and psychological services at the master's degree level, using both counseling and psychological principles and theories as they apply to specific populations and settings. Although programs may vary in the specific model of training and professional development utilized, commitment to science-based education is emphasized in the interest of providing services that are culturally responsive and that promote the public good.

### ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

All programs will be evaluated according to the Accreditation Standards specified in sections A-G. These standards should be dealt with in their entirety by a department's faculty undergoing a self-study in preparation for a site visit. The faculty should evaluate the program(s) against each standard. Detailed information on the accreditation process is available in the [MPCAC Policies and Procedures Manual](#).

**A list of required documentation for each standard is available on the MPCAC website. Note these are minimal expectations and programs should provide whatever documentation is needed to demonstrate compliance.**

#### A. PROGRAM MISSION AND OBJECTIVES

1. The program must have a mission statement that guides the structure and content of the curriculum. The mission statement should reflect a commitment to practitioners who bring scholarship and reflection to their work; and an understanding of diversity in clientele, methodology, and application.
2. Coherence with the mission statement shall be reflected in each program's rationale for curriculum and graduation requirements, the epistemological perspective taught, and the systems for self-evaluation and self-improvement within each program.
3. The program's objectives shall flow from its mission statement. They should reflect current

knowledge from lay and professional groups concerning the present and projected psychological and developmental needs of a multicultural society. Further, the objectives shall reflect consideration of concerns from all persons involved in the conduct of the program including program faculty, current and former students, and personnel in cooperating agencies. The objectives shall be directly related to program activities and written so that they can be evaluated objectively. Finally, each program's objectives shall promote innovation and continuous improvement that emanates from a scientific base which culminates in the application of psychological and/or counseling practice.

## **B. PROGRAM ORIENTATION AND CORE CURRICULUM**

1. The program should be identifiable as educating counseling and psychological service practitioners, using evidence-based counseling and psychological principles and theories as they apply to specific populations and settings. This is defined primarily through the coursework, field work, and disciplinary affiliations of those who teach in and administer the program.
2. The program should be the equivalent of at least two academic years of full-time study. This would normally include a *minimum* of 48 semester hours, or the equivalent quarter hours, which must include the supervised experience described in #3 below.
3. The program must include significant supervised experiences, a *minimum* of 600 hours across at least two semesters. At least 240 of the supervised experiences should be direct contact hours. Supervisors must be appropriately credentialed (commensurate with program goals and relevant state requirements). Faculty supervisor to student ratio must allow for sufficient oversight and therefore should generally be about 1:8.
4. The coursework in the program should emphasize the scientist-practitioner model, which includes the use of current scholarly and research literature to inform practice. The aim is to produce graduates who are scientifically-minded and who remain current in their fields, translating current scholarship and multicultural/diversity knowledge and awareness into practice. The program must reflect a commitment to recognizing varying degrees of applicability of such knowledge and skills to specific populations and settings.
5. The program must demonstrate evidence of students' professional competence, in the standards described A to K below. Competence must be gained by completion of the program through academic and applied experiences.

### **A. Professional identity; and ethical and professional standards**

1. *Ethical/Legal Standards and Policy*: Demonstrates knowledge and application of ethical concepts, and awareness of legal issues regarding professional activities with individuals, groups, and organizations
  - a. Knowledge of ethical, legal and professional standards and guidelines: Demonstrates knowledge and understanding of relevant ethical/professional codes, standards and guidelines, laws, statutes, rules, and regulations
  - b. Awareness and application of ethical decision making: Recognizes situations that challenge adherence to professional values and demonstrates the application of an ethical decision-making model by applying it to ethical dilemmas

- c. Ethical Conduct: Demonstrates integration of ethical values in professional conduct
- 2. *Professional Values and Attitudes*: Exhibits behavior and comports that reflect the values and attitudes of counseling and psychology
  - a. Evidences adherence to professional values throughout professional work
  - b. Demonstrates understanding of counseling and psychological practice as an applied behavioral science
  - c. Maintains professionally appropriate communication and conduct across different settings
  - d. Demonstrates personal accountability and accepts responsibility for own actions
  - e. Demonstrates concern for the welfare of others
  - f. Displays an appropriately defined professional identity
- B. Evidence-based theories and practice of counseling and psychotherapy
  - 1. *Knowledge*: Demonstrates knowledge of individual and group theories of counseling and psychotherapy consistent with program orientation and goals
  - 2. *Relationships*: Relates effectively with individuals, groups, and communities
    - a. Forms and maintains productive and respectful relationships with clients, peers/colleagues, supervisors, and professionals from within and across disciplines
    - b. Negotiates differences and handles conflict satisfactorily
    - c. Provides effective feedback to others, receives feedback non-defensively, and integrates feedback appropriately
    - d. Communicates clearly using verbal, nonverbal, and written skills in a professional context; demonstrates clear understanding and use of professional language
  - 3. *Intervention*: Applies evidence-based intervention and prevention strategies designed to alleviate suffering and to promote health and well-being of individuals, groups, and/or organizations (e.g., career, group, family, and/or systems-level interventions)
    - a. Formulates and conceptualizes cases; plans and implements interventions utilizing at least one consistent theoretical orientation
    - b. Displays skills in developing the therapeutic alliance
    - c. Evaluates intervention progress and modifies intervention or prevention strategies on the basis of evaluation of clients' or groups' progress and/or client feedback
- C. Multiculturalism and diversity
 

Demonstrates knowledge, self-awareness, and skills in working with individuals, groups, and communities who represent various cultural and personal backgrounds and characteristics

  - 1. *Knowledge and Self-Awareness*:
    - a. Demonstrates knowledge and awareness of self, as shaped by individual and cultural diversity (e.g., cultural, individual, and role differences, including

those based on age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language, and socioeconomic status) and context.

b. Demonstrates knowledge and awareness of others, as shaped by individual and cultural diversity and context.

2. *Skills*: Applies knowledge of self and others as cultural beings in assessment, treatment, consultation, and all other professional interactions; is able to work effectively with diverse individuals in assessment, treatment, and consultation.

D. Theories of psychopathology and relevant classification systems

1. *Knowledge*:

a. Demonstrates knowledge of theories of psychopathology, including but not limited to, biological and sociocultural theories

b. Demonstrates knowledge of classification systems of behavior and limitations of those systems

2. *Skills*: Applies concepts of normal/abnormal behavior to case formulation, diagnosis, and treatment planning in the context of stages of human development and diversity

E. Tests, measurements, and other assessments of behavior

1. *Knowledge*:

a. Demonstrates knowledge of content, reliability and validity, and purposes of assessment measures frequently used by counselors and psychological practitioners.

b. Demonstrates awareness of strengths and limitations (including cultural limitations) of administration, scoring, and interpretation of assessment measures.

2. *Skills*: Selects and utilizes appropriate assessment measures across domains of functioning, practice settings, and cultural groups.

F. Research methods and program evaluation

1. *Knowledge*:

a. Demonstrates knowledge of scientific methods commonly used by counselors and psychology practitioners in their clinical work

b. Demonstrates knowledge of use of scientific methods to add to the knowledge base of counseling and psychology

c. Demonstrates knowledge of application of scientific methods to evaluating practices, interventions, and programs

2. *Skills*: Critiques published research effectively

G. Career development and/or the role of work in peoples' lives

1. Demonstrates knowledge of the role of work in peoples' lives

2. Demonstrates understanding of the development of work and career choices across the life span

#### H. Biological basis of behavior

Demonstrates knowledge and understanding of the relationship between biological factors and human functioning

#### I. Developmental basis of behavior

Demonstrates knowledge and understanding of human development, wellness, and learned bases of behavior across the lifespan.

#### J. Social/organizational/community basis of behavior

1. Demonstrates knowledge of individuals in the context of their environment and how the environment (e.g., geographical, ideological, demographic, familial, institutional) affects functioning.
2. Demonstrates understanding of the use of systems changes (whether by prevention or intervention) to enhance the functioning of individuals, families, groups, organizations, and/or institutions.

#### K. Understanding and use of supervision during applied experiences

1. *Knowledge:* Demonstrates understanding of the role and practice of supervision.
2. *Skills:*
  - a. Responds appropriately to supervision
  - b. Engages in reflective practices
  - c. Engages in appropriate self-care strategies

### C. RESEARCH AND CLINICAL INSTRUCTION

1. The scientist-practitioner-based program provides training in both research methods and delivery of professional services. These programs are intended for individuals pursuing careers in which they will integrate and apply the results of research to professional practice and/or be active producers of research. The levels of research and clinical instruction shall be commensurate with the scientist-practitioner model and the goals and objectives of each program which may include academic and research training, laboratory experiences, practicum, and internships which are taken throughout a student's program. Internships shall include practice in assessment procedures, where appropriate.

2. Evidence of the use and production of research data and/or scholarship among program faculty (and students, as appropriate) shall exist and minimally include frequent use of and reference to relevant research findings in instructional experiences, supervision of student research activities by program faculty, and students having the opportunity for collaborative involvement in the research activities of program faculty.

### D. THE INSTITUTION

1. The current institutional catalogue or bulletin shall accurately describe the program, including admission criteria, minimum program requirements, and matriculation requirements (e.g. examinations, academic-standing policies, and financial policies).

2. The program for which accreditation is sought shall clearly be identified as part of the institution's graduate program and shall have a minimum of four (4) graduates within the prior two years.
3. The institution shall provide a budget sufficient to ensure the operation of the program, including sufficient equipment and materials, etc. The institution shall also provide encouragement and support for program faculty to participate in professional organizations and activities (e.g., professional travel, research, and offices held).
4. Library, training, and computer facilities and their resources shall be appropriate for scholarly inquiry, study, and research by program faculty and students.
5. Research support, stipend levels, and departmental support shall be adequate for program faculty and students.
6. Evidence shall exist of cooperative relationships between the program and other institutional academic units and off-campus professional and community resources that contribute to the professional preparation of students in the program.

#### **E. FACULTY AND STAFF**

1. One faculty member shall be clearly designated as the program director for each program in which accreditation is sought, and is responsible for the coordination of the entire program and is the one to whom inquiries regarding the program are addressed. The program director shall hold a graduate degree in psychology, counseling or a closely related field, have professional experience in the program area, hold membership(s) in appropriate professional organizations, be employed by the institution and be regularly involved in the instructional activities of the program (e.g., teach courses, supervise students, etc.).
2. In addition to the program director(s), the other full-time, adjunct, and/or affiliate program faculty members shall hold graduate degrees in psychology, counseling or closely related fields, hold membership(s) in professional organizations, and have had professional experience in the program area. Program faculty members shall be assigned to provide classroom, research, and clinical instruction and supervision only in areas for which they have demonstrated competence. The program will have a sufficient number of appropriately trained faculty to accommodate the labor-intensive nature of teaching the skills of applied psychology and counseling.
3. During the three-year period preceding the date of application for accreditation of the program, the program faculty shall have engaged in activities for professional development/renewal (e.g., attended appropriate program area meetings, conventions, workshops, and seminars), research (e.g., publications and grants), and service (e.g., program presentations, workshops, consultations, speeches, and direct services).
4. Regular, adjunct, and affiliate program faculty who provide on-campus or off-campus instruction and/or supervision shall have relevant professional experience and degrees and have demonstrated

competence in the program area at levels appropriate for the students' program.

5. Each program shall have appropriate secretarial and other support staff relative to the needs and objectives of the program.

6. The teaching loads of program faculty shall be consistent with the goals and objectives of the program and are an integral part of professional preparation, and incorporate allocated time for advisement for, and supervision of, student research, professional research, and, if applicable, administrative responsibilities.

7. There shall be evidence that the institution has sought to recruit and/or retain program faculty members representative of the diversity among people in society.

## **F. PROGRAM ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION**

1. The program and its curriculum should have a coherent organization and structure that reflects its mission statement. Policies and practices within the program are developed and implemented by program faculty, and shall recognize the role of the institution in setting institutional priorities and ensuring that the program fits appropriately within the institutional structure and operating policies.

2. Entrance requirements should reflect the responsibility that the program has to the public. Efforts should be made to ensure that students have the intellectual and personal capabilities required to perform as competent professionals. The level of students matriculating in the program shall comprise a level of preparedness deemed appropriate by each program within the guidelines of the program's mission.

3. The program admissions criteria and selection procedures into the program shall be distributed to prospective students. The criteria and procedures shall include consideration of the goals and objectives commensurate with each individual program. A written policy of commitment to recruitment of students representing a variety of societal subgroups and subcultures shall be developed and implemented by the program faculty. Personnel in various areas of the program and relevant job settings shall be available to discuss pertinent areas of interest with prospective students.

4. Published, planned program of studies, plus appropriate supplemental materials (e.g., institutional catalogues or bulletins and student handbooks) shall be available for use by prospective students, students, and program faculty advisors. The planned programs identify prerequisite curricular experiences, core curriculum requirements, research studies requirements, specialized studies requirements, supervised practicum and internship requirements (if applicable), and appropriate elective curricular experience.

5. Available information should include a formal, written student retention policy, explaining procedures for possible student remediation and/or dismissal from the program for other than academic (i.e., grade point average) reasons, personal and professional expectations held by program faculty for students enrolled in the program, information about professional organizations, involvement, activities potentially appropriate to students in the program, and written program

objectives.

6. Flexibility shall be provided within the program's curriculum to accommodate individual differences in student competencies and understandings acquired before entering the program. Course (or other curricular experience) syllabi shall be available for review by all students enrolled in the program which shall include objectives, content areas, required texts and/or readings, student performance evaluation criteria and procedures.

7. Where assistantships are provided for students in the program, the program faculty shall clearly define the policies for selection, assignment, and continued employment of program students who receive graduate and/or other assistantships.

8. All students shall have an approved faculty advisor at all times. Faculty advisors shall hold an appointment recognized by the institution in the institutional academic unit in which the program is housed.

9. Students shall have the opportunity to participate in workshops, seminars, or similar professional activities that enhance program requirements and facilitate students' personal and professional development (e.g., attendance at regional meetings, webinars, outside speakers, etc.).

#### **G. EVALUATIONS IN THE PROGRAM**

1. Outcome evaluation shall be conducted in reference to each individual program's purposes, goals, and objectives and is essential in the self-study process. Student and graduate achievements, faculty development, and/or program change may be used to measure the evaluation. Through the self-study process, program objectives shall be reviewed and/or revised on a regularly scheduled basis with input from program faculty, current and former students, and personnel in cooperating agencies, and shall be developed in accord with pertinent professional organization positions and perspectives.

2. Continuing evaluation of the program and its outcome shall follow a formal procedure that includes regularly scheduled review by program faculty of program emphases, curricular offerings, current professional trends in the program area, and types of students seeking admission into the program. Evaluation shall also include follow-up studies of graduates of the program, employers of program graduates, field placement supervisors, and personnel in cooperating and associated agencies regarding the assessment of their perceptions and evaluations of the major aspects of the program.

3. The results of program evaluations shall be made available on a systematic basis to students currently enrolled in the program, program faculty, institutional administrators and personnel in cooperating and associated agencies. Students shall have regular and systematic opportunities to evaluate formally the curricular experiences in which they participate.

4. The program will provide evidence describing procedures used for an annual review of student performance, assessment of students' skills development, and progress in the program with clearly described procedures for feedback to the student, and appeal processes.

5. Students will demonstrate competence and professional behavior consistent with each program's mission statement and goals prior to the completion of the program.

## GLOSSARY

**Counseling and Psychological Services:** Providing counseling and psychological services involves using science-based principles of psychology and counseling to establish effective and culturally responsive helping relationships. Providers of counseling and psychological services are skilled in the application of assessment and interventions to facilitate behavioral change and enhance functioning.

**Culturally Responsive:** Emphasis on the application of theories and scientific principles that are relevant and pertinent of specific populations and/or specific socio-cultural contexts, where the uniqueness of each individual is accounted for and each person's well-being is maximized.

**Direct Contact:** Therapeutic interaction with actual clients, which may occur in single therapist or co-therapist contexts. Audio and video interactions are permitted and are generally expected to be at least 15 minutes in length.

**Evidence-Based:** "The integration of the best available research with clinical expertise in the context of patient characteristics, culture, and preferences" (American Psychological Association, 2005).

**Faculty Supervisor to Student Ratio:** This ratio is to be computed based on the number of students who are under a faculty member's direct supervision in either an individual or group format. Thus, the number of faculty in the ratio will generally be 1 and the number of students will be the number under that individual's direct supervision. It is **not** to be calculated based on the total number of program faculty compared with total number of program students.

**Public Good:** The public good means "in the best interest of the people" and is demonstrated by the exhibition of professional ethics and a social justice perspective.

**Science-Based:** The systematic understanding and application of scientific theory, empirical research, and general scientific principles through observation and experiment (e.g., objective thinking, repeated assessment for progress monitoring, delivering intervention sequentially). It includes understanding the clinical applications of research; research methodology; techniques of data collection and analysis; biological and cognitive-affective bases of behavior; development across the lifespan; and respect for scientifically derived knowledge.

**Scientist-Practitioner Model:** The use of current scholarly and research literature to inform practice, which includes the ability to objectively critique the quality of published materials, to identify valid research conclusions, and to apply such scholarship to clinical work.

**Social Justice:** "The promotion of equity for all people and groups for the purpose of ending oppression and injustice affecting clients, students, counselors, families, communities, schools, workplaces, governments, and other social and institutional systems" (American Counseling Association, 2014).

**Supervised Experience:** Therapeutic-related professional work conducted under the oversight of a professional supervisor. Experience may include observation, case conferences,

documentation, and other activities directly related to the provision of counseling and psychological services.