

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 addressed 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 must have measurable learning objectives that flow from its mission statement. They should reflect the 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 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. MPCAC-accredited programs must be the equivalent of at least two academic years of full-time study and 60 credits (or the equivalent quarter credits), which must include the supervised experience as described in #3 below.
3. The program must include significant supervised experiences, a *minimum* of 600 hours across at least two semesters with 240 direct client contact hours.
4. The coursework in the program shall emphasize the science-based education and training 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 curriculum must provide adequate coverage of each of the standards described below, B.5.a. to B.5.k., demonstrated through a curriculum map and course syllabi.

a. Ethical and professional standards

- i. *Ethical/Legal Standards, Policy, and Practice*: Demonstrates knowledge and application of ethical concepts, and awareness of legal issues regarding professional activities with individuals, groups, and organizations
 1. 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
 2. 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
 3. Ethical conduct: Demonstrates integration of ethical values in professional conduct
- ii. *Professional Values and Attitudes*: Exhibits behavior and comporment that reflect the professional values and attitudes of counseling and psychology.
 1. Demonstrates understanding of counseling and psychological practice as an applied behavioral science
 2. Maintains professionally appropriate communication and conduct across different settings
 3. Demonstrates personal accountability and accepts responsibility for own actions
 4. Demonstrates knowledge and awareness of professional identities relevant to counseling and psychology.
- iii. *Understanding and use of supervision during applied experiences*
 1. Demonstrates understanding of the role and practice of supervision.
 2. Demonstrates knowledge of the critical role of reflective practice
 3. Demonstrates knowledge of the impact of self-care on professional practice

4. Responds appropriately to supervision

b. Evidence-based theories and practice of counseling and psychotherapy

i. *Knowledge:*

1. Demonstrates knowledge of individual and group theories of counseling and psychotherapy
2. Demonstrates knowledge of theories regarding the impact of trauma on individuals, groups and communities.

ii. *Skills*

1. *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

2. *Conceptualization and Intervention:* Applies evidence-based intervention and prevention strategies designed to alleviate suffering and to promote health and well-being of individuals, groups, units, and/or systems.

- a. Formulates and conceptualizes cases;
- b. Plans and implements interventions utilizing at least one consistent theoretical orientation
- c. Displays skills in developing the therapeutic alliance
- d. Displays skills in crisis intervention
- e. 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 (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.

i. *Knowledge and Self-Awareness:*

1. Demonstrates knowledge and awareness of self, as shaped by individual and cultural diversity

2. Demonstrates knowledge and awareness of others, as shaped by individual and cultural diversity and context
3. Demonstrates knowledge of the intersection between self and others as shaped by individual and cultural diversity and context

ii. *Skills:*

1. Applies knowledge of self as a cultural being in assessment, treatment, consultation, and all other professional interactions
2. Applies knowledge of others as cultural beings in assessment, treatment, consultation, and all other professional interactions
3. Applies knowledge of the intersection of self and others as cultural beings in assessment, treatment, consultation, and all other professional interactions
4. Is able to work effectively with diverse individuals in assessment, treatment, and consultation.

d. Theories of psychopathology and relevant classification systems

i. *Knowledge:*

1. Demonstrates knowledge of theories of psychopathology, including but not limited to biological and sociocultural theories
2. Demonstrates knowledge of classification systems of behavior and limitations of those systems

ii. *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. Methods of evaluation

i. *Knowledge:*

1. Demonstrates knowledge of content, reliability and validity, and purposes of assessment measures
2. Demonstrates awareness of strengths and limitations (including cultural limitations) of administration, scoring, and interpretation of assessment measures

ii. *Skills:*

1. Selects and utilizes appropriate methods of evaluation
2. Engages in effective clinical interviewing
3. Engages in effective progress monitoring

g. Research methods

i. *Knowledge:*

1. Demonstrates knowledge of scientific methods used by counselors and psychology practitioners in their clinical work
2. Demonstrates knowledge of use of scientific methods to add to the knowledge base of counseling and psychology

3. Demonstrates knowledge of application of scientific methods to evaluate practices and interventions
 4. Demonstrates knowledge of program evaluation methods
- ii. *Skills*: Critiques published research effectively

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

- i. Demonstrates knowledge of the role of work in peoples' lives
- ii. Demonstrates understanding of the development of work and career choices across the lifespan

i. Biological basis of behavior

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

j. Developmental basis of behavior

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

k. Systems basis of behavior

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

C. COUNSELING/CLINICAL INSTRUCTION

1. Counseling/Clinical Skills Training:

Programs will provide significant experiential practice in skills development courses with faculty feedback. Class size must allow for sufficient interaction with the instructor for the level of skill training

2. Field Placement

- a. The program must include significant supervised experiences, a *minimum* of 600 hours across at least two semesters.
 - i. At least 240 of the supervised experiences must be direct contact hours.
 - ii. Supervisors must be appropriately credentialed (commensurate with program goals and relevant state requirements).
 - iii. Faculty field placement instructor to student ratio must allow for sufficient oversight and therefore should generally be about 1:8
- b. Practicum and internship settings must foremost be committed to training and students' duties should be learning focused to allow for development of expected competencies and clinical skills. The program shall:
 - i. Have a process for identifying, approving, monitoring, and managing field

- placement sites as well as policies for managing any difficulties that occur with sites, supervisors, or students
- ii. Have written agreements with sites which outline responsibilities and expectations of the institution, site, supervisor, and student.
 - iii. Adequately orient supervisors and students to expectations and requirements
- c. Supervision shall be 1 hour minimum per week
 - d. Evaluation of students completing field placement must include direct observation and/or review of audio/video recordings as well as formal written feedback

D. THE INSTITUTION

1. The current institutional catalog 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, 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. Program Core Faculty shall be full-time and/or have a multiyear academic appointment with significant and identifiable responsibilities devoted to program-related activities and functioning. Core faculty are individuals whose education, training and experience are consistent with the program mission.
2. In addition to the core faculty, all others involved with the program are considered contributing faculty. The program must orient and provide oversight of courses taught by contributing faculty to ensure faculty effectiveness in meeting program objectives and accreditation standards.
3. 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, supervision of student research, professional research, and, if applicable, administrative responsibilities.
4. Programs must be committed to, and demonstrate evidence of diversity, equity and inclusion in relationship to the recruitment and retention of faculty and staff.
5. All faculty shall be assigned to provide classroom, research, clinical instruction and supervision only in areas for which they have demonstrated competence and recognized credentials.

6. 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. The total number of course credits taught by other contributing faculty may not exceed the total number of course credits taught by core faculty over any two-year period.
7. One faculty member shall be clearly designated as the program director, 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 be a core faculty member and have sufficient time to manage the needs of the program. There must be administration of the program year-round.
8. The program shall have an identified field placement coordinator who is responsible for the oversight and management of all field placement experiences and inquiries.
9. During the previous three-year period, the core faculty shall have engaged in activities for professional development/renewal (e.g., attended appropriate program area meetings, conventions, workshops, and seminars), as well as research (e.g., publications and grants), and/or service (e.g., program presentations, workshops, consultations, speeches, and direct services).
10. Each program shall have appropriate administrative and other support staff to address the needs and objectives of the program.

F. PROGRAM ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION

1. The program and its curriculum should have a coherent organization and structure that reflects its mission statement. If the program has multiple program locations, they must be identical in curriculum and syllabi/admissions and graduation requirements, have a single administrative entity or in a partnership or consortium among separate administrative entities (with a formal agreement to pool resources), and allow students to take courses at any location; as such, it is considered a single program.
2. 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 to ensure that the program fits appropriately within the institutional structure and operating policies.
3. Entrance requirements should reflect the responsibility that the program has to the public. Admitted students have demonstrated a level of preparedness deemed appropriate for the program's mission and objectives.
4. The program admissions criteria and selection procedures into the program shall be available for prospective students. The criteria and procedures shall include consideration of the goals and objectives commensurate with each individual program.
5. Programs must be committed to, and demonstrate evidence of, diversity, equity and inclusion in relationship to the recruitment and retention of students who are representative of the diversity among people in society.
6. 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.
7. 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.

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.). 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.

G. EVALUATIONS IN THE PROGRAM

1. Outcome evaluation shall be conducted in reference to each individual program's learning objectives. Program learning objectives shall be reviewed and/or revised on a regularly scheduled basis considering empirically-based developments in the field with input from program faculty, current and former students, and personnel in cooperating agencies.
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, and admissions processes. Evaluation shall also include feedback from current students, graduates of the program, field placement supervisors, and personnel in cooperating and associated agencies regarding the assessment of the program.
3. The results of program evaluations shall be made available on a systematic basis to students currently enrolled in the program, core and other contributing faculty, institutional administrators and personnel in cooperating and associated agencies.
4. The program shall have documented policies and procedures and provide evidence of annual reviews of student academic and professional performance, assessment of students' skills development, and progress in the program with clearly described procedures for feedback to each student, and appeal processes.
5. Students will have demonstrated competence in the practice of counseling and psychology upon completion of the program. Programs must clearly explain how each of following competencies is measured and provide data regarding student performance from the last three years.
 - Ethics
 - Diversity
 - Integration of research and evidence-based practice
 - Communication and therapeutic relationship-building
 - Methods of evaluation and assessment
 - Conceptualization and intervention

H. Communication and Record Keeping

1. Programs must post annual admissions, retention, graduation and program outcome data on the program website.
2. Accredited programs are responsible for maintaining continued compliance with all standards and policies and procedures.
3. The program must notify the accrediting body in a timely manner any potential or actual changes that impact the program (e.g., faculty or administration, institutional environment,

resources, or operations). Change of program director must be reported within 30 days of the change.

4. A statement regarding the status of MPCAC accreditation must be on the program's website homepage.

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GLOSSARY

- Contributing Faculty:** Those who teach in the program but are not formally involved in the decision-making or advising aspects of the program.
- Core Faculty:** Defined for the purposes of MPCAC to ensure stability for the program, faculty are full time and/or have multi-year contracts who teach in the program, advise students, and participate in the decision-making aspects of the program. Core faculty are individuals whose education, training and experience are consistent with the program mission.
- 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" (APA, 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.
- Science-Based 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.
- Skills Training Courses:** Provide direct experiences in the development of counseling skills in classroom settings with student peers or relevant others, and with direct observation and feedback provided by supervising faculty.
- 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.

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