

Personal and Professional Dispositions: Standards for Success in the Counseling Program

MS in Professional Counseling Program

To support the mission, goals, and objectives of the MS Program in Professional Counseling, the faculty fosters, promotes, and infuses the following values and guiding principles throughout every aspect of the program. Every student is expected to always exhibit these values.

The dispositions students are expected to demonstrate are organized into four key categories:

As a CARING PERSON

- Demonstrate genuineness, empathy, and interest in the welfare of others
- Display sensitivity to the feelings, thoughts, and needs of others
- Respect the autonomy and beliefs of others, refrain from imposing personal beliefs
- Exhibit sensitivity to individual and cultural identities; demonstrate cultural competence
- Commit to self-care practices that support physical health
- Commit to self-care practices that support mental health

As an INFORMED FACILITATOR OF LEARNING AND GROWTH

- Translate academic information into practice
- Remain open to ideas, learning, and change
- Follow the procedures and policies of the counseling program
- Participate actively and appropriately in class as expected by instructors
- Cooperate with remediation plans and work to adjust or improve behavior
- Engage productively in supervision and consultation with colleagues and peers
- Act with awareness of how personal actions impact others

As a REFLECTIVE DECISION-MAKER

- Demonstrate objectivity appropriate to the situation or setting
- Exhibit maturity and good judgment in reactions and behaviors
- Accept responsibility for actions and problems
- Manage personal mental health, emotional problems, stress, and interpersonal issues effectively
- Demonstrate personal and professional integrity in stated thoughts and actions
- Solicit, consider, and thoughtfully respond to constructive feedback
- Participate in self-reflection and self-exploration

- Communicate information truthfully and accurately
- Exhibit awareness of and respect for appropriate interpersonal boundaries
- Exhibit awareness of personal beliefs, values, needs, strengths, and limitations — and understand their potential influence on personal and professional performance

As a COMMITTED PROFESSIONAL

- Maintain a professional identity as a counselor
- Respect the privacy and confidentiality needs of others
- Understand and uphold the ethical guidelines of the counseling profession
- Engage actively in learning, training, and experiential opportunities for development
- Prioritize clients' interests over self-interest when providing professional services
- Maintain sensitivity to role differences and power dynamics, managing them appropriately
- Exhibit professional attire and demeanor, appropriate to different settings
- Establish and maintain effective, functional personal, professional, and therapeutic relationships
- Communicate respectfully and professionally (written, oral, and non-verbal communication)
- Fulfill obligations promptly, consistently, reliably, and according to stated expectations

The program maintains a strong commitment to modeling and preserving a healthy balance between cognitive and emotional development. This balance is considered a major strength, and students are encouraged to fully embrace the personal growth that is an integral part of the counseling training process.

To assist and encourage students in maintaining their own commitment to personal growth, counseling program faculty members have the responsibility to **assess the progress** of each student. Faculty members also function as **gatekeepers** for both the program and the counseling profession.

In the MS in Professional Counseling program, student assessment is a **comprehensive, ongoing process** designed to support professional growth and ensure readiness for clinical practice.

According to Saccuzzo (1997), in the clinical professions, educators and supervisors are expected to act as gatekeepers before and after students receive their degrees. Within the context of the allied mental health professions, the term **gatekeeping** has been defined as the ongoing responsibility of faculty members and clinical supervisors to monitor trainee progress and appropriateness for professional practice (Homrich & Henderson, 2018).

Gatekeeping serves several essential purposes:

1. Protecting the welfare of current and future clients by ensuring effective treatment, safeguarding rights, and upholding dignity and respect
2. Safeguarding the welfare of the student or supervisee
3. Promoting the well-being of other trainees or colleagues affected by the student or supervisee
4. Preserving the integrity of the counseling profession by graduating only competent, ethical practitioners
5. Maintaining the trustworthiness and reputation of the program, institution, and profession

The MS in Professional Counseling program provides formal evaluation at multiple points, called "**gates**" or **checkpoints** carefully placed across the training experience. (See Counseling Student Handbook, Appendices B and C.)

Each student is evaluated based on:

- Academic performance
- Clinical skills
- Professional dispositions

This comprehensive assessment approach ensures that students are not only academically prepared but are also personally and professionally ready to serve as effective and ethical counselors.