

## **USW Clinical Mental Health Counseling Retention, Remediation, and Dismissal Policy**

Students who fail to demonstrate basic knowledge, communication, interpersonal skills, ethics, and/or counseling skills may be asked to seek remediation. Students who fail to grasp and demonstrate basic communication, ethics, counseling skills and interpersonal skills will not be accepted for Practicum/Internship placement.

As professional counselors, our faculty members are held to the highest standards of the profession. The 2014 ACA Code of Ethics requires that professional counselors be “gatekeepers” for the profession. Any student who demonstrate personal limitations that might impede future performance, or who violate ethical standards, and/or who are ineffective and/or harmful to clients, will be asked to leave the program.

The faculty of the Mental Health Counseling program at the University of the Southwest is dedicated to the education and development of competent professional counselors who will represent USW’s program proudly, and effectively. As members of the counseling profession, USW’s mental health counseling faculty adheres to and promotes the professional ethics of the profession as delineated in the 2014 ACA Code of Ethics (American Counseling Association) and the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES 2003).

We affirm our right as well as our ethical responsibility in the training and supervision of graduate students in counseling, to develop clear policies regarding students and their experiences in USW’s Mental Health Counseling graduate program. In adhering to the 2014 ACA Code of Ethics, we have established policies regarding field placement (ACA, 2014, F.7.i.), student competency in clinical, non-clinical, and academic experiences (ACA, 2014, F.9.a.), and “address the inabilities of some students to achieve counseling competencies that might impede performance” (ACA, 2014, F.8.d.) as future professional counselors. We therefore, follow section F.6.b. of the ACA Code of Ethics (2014) regarding gatekeeping and remediation. Specifically, we will inform students of the need for remediation, help students in securing remedial assistance, seek professional consultation and document any decisions regarding remediation, retention or dismissal; and we ensure that students are aware of options available to them to address such decisions.

### **PRIORITIES, EXPECTATIONS, AND STUDENT COMPETENCIES**

As posted on the USW website, we hold certain values, priorities, and expectations to be important in our process of training future counseling professionals.

Every aspect of USW’s Mental Health Counseling graduate degree program is designed to promote, encourage and foster the following values, guidelines and principles. Each and every

faculty member, student and field supervisor is therefore expected to follow and demonstrate the following at all times:

- The highest ethical and professional standards;
- Evidence-based practices in counseling;
- Ethical and social responsibility;
- Personal and professional growth;
- Respect for diversity and the importance of culture, family and values in the counseling process;
- Collaboration with community and outside agencies;
- Leadership, continued learning, service and professional identity in professional counseling and counselor education;
- The integration of research, teaching, and practice.

Based on the above-referenced priorities and expectations, the following PROGRAM OBJECTIVES of the University of the Southwest's *specific to students* in italicized and bold text are:

- Prepare, promote, and graduate ***interpersonally and inter-professionally skilled, culturally competent, professionally knowledgeable, ethical, self-reflective, compassionate and license-eligible*** counselors.

The faculty of the Mental Health Counseling graduate degree program have additionally delineated specific competencies that address the unique skills and behaviors that embody the ideal counselor in mental health settings and school settings. These Priorities, Expectations, and Competencies comprise the measures by which students in USW's Mental Health Counseling program will be assessed for social appropriateness in the field of professional counseling. Students will be informed of these expectations prior to admission to the program and will be asked to sign this statement that they have read, acknowledge and agree to abide by these guidelines with their acceptance of the admissions invitation.

This PROGRESSIVE REMEDIATION, RETENTION, AND DISMISSAL POLICY is posted on the USW website and the link or the policy statement itself will be posted within each course.

## **REMEDICATION**

A student at any point in the program may be deemed as "at risk" in terms of failure to demonstrate appropriate academic performance, professional counseling skills, or appropriate personal skills. Deficits in any of these areas that prevent a student from performing what is necessary to be a professional counselor will result in an initiated and documented plan for remediation. (The latter statement assumes that the student is not subject to immediate dismissal from the program as outlined in USW's academic policies, Honor Code, or Student Handbook, or as deemed necessary to protect the public).

An individual student's remediation plan will be designed to address areas of concern and will be developed and defined as follows:

1. That, with consultation from other program faculty members, the student's USW program advisor, and when appropriate, the student's on-site field placement supervisor, and other professionals who can provide relevant input, will establish a plan;
2. That is presented to the individual student;
3. That is discussed in relation to the faculty's concerns, and if applicable, to the protection of the public and the field placement site; and
4. That is agreed upon and signed by the USW program advisor, the student and a faculty member who will monitor the student's progress and completion of the remediation plan with notification to USW's mental health counseling program faculty.

**Remediation plans specifically may involve one or more of the following:**

A. Academic Remediation

- a) retaking of courses
- b) engaging in tutoring
- c) test-taking training
- d) study skills training
- e) writing skills training
- f) spoken and/or written language skills remediation
- g) other academic interventions as deemed necessary and appropriate by program faculty

B. Professional Skill Remediation

- a) retaking of courses (ie: ethics, skills courses, content courses)
- b) removal from field placement site
- c) reassignment of placement site
- d) specific assigned activities at placement site
- e) writing reflection papers
- f) additional supervision meetings/consultations
- g) other professional skills interventions as deemed necessary and appropriate by the USW counseling program faculty

C. Personal Remediation

- a) personal counseling
- b) writing reflection papers
- c) writing letters of apology
- d) additional supervision meetings/consultations
- e) other personal remediation interventions as deemed necessary and appropriate by the USW counseling program faculty

The remediation plan will include at a minimum, the following:

1. specific activities to be completed
2. target measures of accomplishment (will be documented)
3. a schedule of regular meetings (video conferencing if student is not on or near USW campus) between the student and the faculty member responsible for monitoring and documenting the remediation plan (if this person is different from the student's advisor)
4. a timeframe for accomplishment
5. contact information for the faculty member responsible for monitoring the student's progress

Copies of the plan will be maintained in the student's file as well as by the student's advisor, the program coordinator, and the student. The monitoring faculty member will also retain notes documenting all meetings during the course of the remediation process.

### **RETENTION**

Upon completion of the remediation plan, the advisor, the student and the faculty member responsible for monitoring the plan will meet (video conferencing if need be) to discuss the success of the remediation plan. If the evidence presented suggests that the plan has been successful, the advisor and responsible faculty member will advise the program faculty of the successful resolution of concerns. If the evidence of successful remediation is questionable, additional remediation activities may be deemed necessary. All the conditions of appropriate remediation will apply as outlined above. All discussions will be documented.

### **DISMISSAL**

There are 4 entities that have published policies that determine enrollment at the University of the Southwest. The policies that determine continued enrollment are itemized here and clarified below:

1. Those determined by the University in terms of behavior.
2. Those determined by the Graduate program in terms of academic behavior.
3. Those determined by the College of Arts and Sciences in terms of criminal background checks, and
4. Those determined by the Mental Health Counseling program in terms of academic success, professional success, and personal success.

### **Determined by the University**

Behavior that is deemed unacceptable by the University community may subject a student to dismissal from the University. Such behaviors are delineated on the USW website in the Student Handbook and in the Honor Code. However, as USW's graduate program in Mental Health Counseling is online, behaviors that might warrant possible dismissal from the University can include:

1. Academic misconduct (ie: plagiarism, cheating)
2. Threatening or harassing behavior (ie: instructor/classmate)
3. Endangering health or safety (ie: background check information)
4. Sexual misconduct (ie: background check information)
5. Destructive online behavior (ie: instructor/publisher/classmate written or printed materials/entries)
6. Dangerous weapons or devices (ie: reported/discovered/validated)
7. Theft/unauthorized use of property (ie: course material/online documents)
8. Other behavior deemed inappropriate for a counseling student and future counseling professional (ie: personal issues/behavior)

### **Determined by the Graduate Program**

Academic standards are addressed by the Graduate program. These can be found on USW's website. Graduate students must maintain an overall GPA of 3.0 (B) and have an overall GPA of 3.0 at the time of graduation to receive their degree.

### **Determined by the College of Arts and Sciences**

Evidence of a criminal background check that indicates criminal convictions that would preclude a student from becoming licensed as a professional mental health counselor would lead to a discussion of the student's purpose in remaining in the program.

### **Determined by the Mental Health Counseling Program**

Should a student be unable or unwilling to complete a remediation plan as outlined in this document, the faculty of the program has the option of using *dismissal from the program* as an action of last resort. If this action is taken, the faculty will:

1. Document all evidence leading to this decision.
2. Inform the student of the decision.
3. Inform the Dean
4. Inform the program director of the Mental Health Counseling program.
5. Inform the student of his/her due process options, and
6. Provide the contact information for the person to whom an appeal could be made. (See the Office of the Provost for procedures and documentation).

As a prospective student in the University of the Southwest's Mental Health Counseling graduate degree program, your questions are always welcomed. Please contact the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences or the Program Coordinator of the Mental Health Counseling program if you have questions or concerns.

*\*The University of the Southwest's Mental Health Counseling Program's Statement of Progressive Remediation, Retention, and Dismissal Policy has been modeled directly after The Ohio State University's policy, published on*

*the worldwide web. USW thanks and appreciates the generosity of The Ohio State University's availability of their policy as well as their permission to use portions of their statement for USW's use.*