

Fitness to Practice Policy & Guidelines

MA- Guidance and Counseling Programs

Texas A&M University-San Antonio

I. Purpose

This policy outlines the scope, standards, procedures, and support mechanisms to ensure that students in the Master of Arts in Guidance and Counseling programs at *Texas A&M University-San Antonio* demonstrate the fitness to practice (FtP) necessary for professional and ethical counselor development. This includes both academic performance and the personal dispositions that are consistent with the roles and responsibilities of professional counselors across practice settings.

II. Scope

This policy applies to all graduate students enrolled in the Master of Arts in Guidance and Counseling programs (Clinical Mental Health Counseling; Marriage, Couple, and Family Counseling; School Counseling) within the Department of Counseling, Health and Kinesiology at *Texas A&M University-San Antonio* and applies to conduct in academic and non-academic settings.

III. Definition of Fitness to Practice

Fitness to practice (FtP) refers to a student's capacity to successfully complete the curricular requirements associated with their program of study and demonstrate the dispositional characteristics associated with a competent, ethical, and responsible counselor-in-training. A student's FtP is a dynamic status based on the attitudes, behaviors, knowledge, and skills that could be reasonably expected given their current stage of professional development and encompasses:

- Academic integrity
- Counseling skill acquisition and application
- Respectful interactions with peers, faculty, staff, supervisors, and colleagues
- Appropriate responsiveness to feedback and supervision
- Adherence to ethical and legal requirements
- Personal well-being and self-care

IV. Standards of Professional Behavior

Students are expected to demonstrate the acquisition and application of the counseling-related knowledge and skills essential to working with individuals, groups, and communities from various backgrounds. This not only includes meeting the academic standards associated with meeting the Council for Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP) *Standards* and university policies, but also demonstrating adherence to the ethical and legal requirements detailed in the *ACA Code of Ethics*, the *Code of Ethics of the Texas State Board of Examiners of Professional Counselors*, and the ethical codes of other licenses and/or certifications applicable to their areas of emphasis (e.g., Texas State Board of Examiners of Marriage and Family Therapists and Texas Education Agency), as well as emotional well-being and self-care practices.

V. Student Monitoring, Evaluation, and Indicators of Concern

Student progress is continuously monitored and evaluated through informal and formal methods which are formative and summative in nature. The outcomes of these activities may be reviewed and discussed among faculty-of-record and coordinators, within program-level reviews, and/or in consultation with university. It is the duty of faculty members in the Guidance and Counseling programs to evaluate all students according to the FtP definition and standards identified in Sections IV and V across all settings in which faculty members and students interact such as advising appointments, course instruction, consultation activities, clinical supervision, and personal conversations. During these activities faculty will respect the students' right to privacy; however, within these boundaries students are expected to engage with and respond to evaluations in appropriate ways and, in all cases, demonstrate consistency with the standards for practice and performance as explained. At the onset of their academic program and throughout their course of studies, students are directed to review these standards and seek clarification when needed.

Positive, developmental indicators of a students' fitness to practice includes knowledge and adherence to course and field experience site policies; acquiring counseling skills and demonstrating sufficient use during course simulations and field experience practice; demonstrating collegiality, respect for differences, and supporting peers; proactively seeking feedback and integrating support into learning experiences; knowledge and demonstration of ethical practices; engaging in self-reflection and utilizing available resources to maintain personal well-being. Indicators that are contrary to estimations of a student's FtP that may arise from regular monitoring and evaluation activities include, but are not limited to:

Academic integrity

- Plagiarism and/or submitting the work of others as your own
- Unauthorized use of generative AI to complete course requirements and assignments
- Forms of cheating or misrepresenting effort toward course requirements
- Disruptions to the learning environment

Counseling skill acquisition and application

- Using skills in a judgmental manner
- Ineffective or harmful session management skills
- Use of skills or strategies that are harmful to clients
- Inadequate demonstration of client-student boundaries

Respectful interactions with peers, faculty, staff, supervisors, and colleagues

- Attire that is inconsistent with university and site policies
- Using dismissive or disrespectful communication
- Poor engagement in promoting the personal and professional growth of others
- Insensitivity to the learning experiences of others

Appropriate responsiveness to feedback and supervision

- Responding defensively to feedback
- Non-observance of feedback in subsequent activities
- Persistence of negative or harmful activities following feedback

- Does not show flexibility or adaptability to changing circumstances or feedback

Adherence to ethical and legal requirements

- Insufficient demonstration of awareness and implementation of relevant ethical codes and laws
- Avoiding or not seeking consultation with supervisors and/or university instructors
- Timely and effective documentation practices
- Inappropriate breach of confidentiality

Personal well-being and self-care

- Inconsistent engagement in practices to develop self-awareness and self-reflection
- Failure to monitor, acknowledge, or disclose signs of impairment
- Not seeking assistance for problems that reach the point of impairment
- Failure to maintain sufficient self-care practices

VI. Reporting and Documentation of an FtP Concern

Faculty who have concerns about a student meeting any of the Fitness to Practice criteria may take any or all the following steps as necessary:

- Discuss the concerns directly with the student and seek to work with the student to resolve the difficulties.
- Advise the FtP coordinator and coordinator of counseling programs of the concern(s) to identify potential patterns and issues related to the student.
- Document dates and FtP concerns with students using Counseling Competencies Scale-Revised (CCS-R) and provide a copy of the signed form to the FtP coordinator and coordinator of counseling programs for documentation purposes.
- If an FtP issue arises at a field-based site, the site supervisor may discuss concerns directly with the A&M-SA faculty member. The student may also be included in this meeting.

When a faculty member determines that a reasonable or persistent FtP concern is present outside of academic policies, the faculty member will complete and submit a CCS-R through Tevera and notify the FtP coordinator which will prompt a formal, responsive review.

VII. Responsive Review and Support Processes

A formal review will be initiated by the FtP coordinator within 10 business days of receiving the completed CCS-R referral through Tevera. In response to this action, the following steps will guide the process:

- 1) The FtP coordinator will review all submitted documentation and assign a minimum of three faculty as members of the FtP review committee for the case.
- 2) The FtP coordinator will inform the student by email that an FtP case has been opened and provide details about the related process, timeline, and possible outcomes associated with any FtP review.
- 3) The assigned committee members review the CCS-R and related case documentation and determine whether additional materials are required. If additional materials or information are required, the committee members will make a request for those items within the boundaries of the students' rights to privacy and confidentiality.

- 4) FtP committee members will schedule a meeting with the student to review the CCS-R and related case documentation. The students will respond to the meeting request within 5 business days and make a reasonable effort to meet with the committee members. Non-responsiveness will not delay the FtP procedure and may be regarded as non-compliance with these procedures.
- 5) FtP committee members will formulate recommendations for support, remediation, or dismissal. Support and remediation plans will be aligned with the indicators of concern.
- 6) The student will meet with FtP committee members to review the summary findings and recommendations for support, remediation, or dismissal. The student will be provided an opportunity to discuss and respond to the committee's findings and recommendations. In the event that a student has additional information regarding the FtP referral following this meeting, they should submit a written statement to the FtP Chair who will share the materials with the assigned committee members and include as an addendum to the corpus of documents.
- 7) If support or remediation is indicated, the committee members and students will collaborate to finalize an individualized support or remediation plan which will include related activities, resources, supports, outcomes, and a timeline.
- 8) Students who receive a support or remediation plan may be required to adhere to meet with the FtP committee members or Chair at follow up intervals to provide evidence of progress or completion of the activities detailed in their individualized plan. During these meetings, additional activities, resources, supports, outcomes, and timelines may emerge in response to student development and needs. Failure to meet the goals or expectations outlined in the student's individualized plan, or to demonstrate adequate progress, may result in further action by the FtP committee. This may include the development of a revised FtP plan or, in more serious cases, a recommendation for dismissal from the program.
- 9) The FtP coordinator will draft a summary memo of the proceedings to the Department Chair.

VIII. Student Appeal of Review Disposition

Students have the right to appeal the determination of the FtP Committee. In these instances, the student may submit an appeal to the Department Chair within 10 business days of receiving the decision from the FtP Committee. The Department Chair will have an opportunity to meet with the student, FtP Chair, and committee members to understand the context, process, and outcomes of the review process. Based on the information provided by the student, FtP Chair, and committee members, the Department Chair will communicate their decision to the student in writing. If the student is not satisfied with the chair's assessment of the issue or if the FtP Committee refuses to alter their decision and recommendations after discussing it with the chair, the student may request a review of the decision by the Dean for the College of Education and Human Development. This step is the final step of the process. The decision of the Dean (or Dean's designee) will be final.

IX. Confidentiality

All FtP activities will honor confidentiality in accordance with FERPA guidelines, as well as A&M-SA and Texas A&M University System policies.

X. Policy Review

The Guidance and Counseling policy Fitness to Practice Policy & Guidelines are reviewed biennially, at a minimum, by the program faculty to ensure alignment with current best practices, accreditation standards, ethical and legal codes, and university policies.