

STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS SYSTEM ★ NACOGDOCHES, TEXAS



PROFESSIONAL COUNSELING PROGRAM

Clinical Mental Health

Graduate Student Handbook

Academic Year 2024-2025

Effective Fall 2024

Department of Human Services and Educational Leadership

James I. Perkins College of Education

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Department of Human Services and Educational Leadership

Welcome

You are about to begin an exciting journey in the graduate professional counseling program that will equip you for a rewarding career, helping people experiencing mental health concerns live their best lives.

Our program stands out in two key ways. First, we offer a low faculty-to-student ratio, ensuring you get the personalized attention you deserve. Second, we have an in-house counseling clinic where you'll have the chance to work with real clients from our campus and local communities. You'll start by observing counseling sessions and, before you know it, you'll be seeing your own clients during your supervised practicum.

Clients want to know their counselors have been trained face-to-face, not just through a computer screen. After all, who would feel confident getting medical treatment from someone who's never practiced in person?

We believe that the best counselors are made through in-person training, and we'd love for you to be part of that experience.

Message to Students

This manual is designed to answer many of the questions you may have about the Master of Arts Degree in Professional Counseling. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with its contents. This manual contains information on the Program's mission and objectives, admission procedures, application for candidacy, comprehensive examination, course requirements and class sequences, practicum and internship requirements.

The manual is not a substitute for meeting with your advisor but rather a supplement to your meetings with them. It is the student's responsibility to also consult the online University Catalog for additional information.

Degree program changes may be made without immediately appearing in this manual; therefore, students should check with their faculty advisor. The Program reserves the right to make such program changes and notify students regarding such changes. Students may also find Professional Counseling Program information available on the website of the College of Education. Further questions can be directed to your advisor or the Professional Counseling Program Coordinator.

Mission Statement of the Department of Human Services and Educational Leadership

We prepare graduate students for leadership and service careers in assisting clients with mental health needs. Our program is committed to the incorporation of community-based, service-learning experiences within its educational programs to maximize the advancement of students' personal and professional development.

Professional Counseling Program

Scope of Practice

Mental health counseling is a systematic process that assists individuals in achieving their personal, emotional, and psychological well-being through the application of therapeutic techniques and interventions. The counseling process involves communication, goal setting, and behavioral interventions tailored to the unique needs of each client. The specific techniques and modalities utilized within mental health counseling may include, but are not limited to:

a) assessment and appraisal; b) diagnosis and treatment planning; c) individual, group, and family counseling interventions focused on improving mental health and managing emotional distress; d) crisis intervention and trauma-informed care; e) case management, referral, and coordination of services; f) program evaluation and research; g) interventions aimed at reducing psychological and environmental barriers to well-being; h) consultation services with other healthcare providers, educational institutions, and community organizations; i) advocacy for clients in various settings, including legal and social service systems; and j) psychoeducation and skills training to enhance coping strategies and resilience.

Mental health counselors can be found working in a variety of settings, including private practice, community mental health centers, hospitals, schools, substance abuse treatment facilities, correctional institutions, employee assistance programs, and residential care facilities. They work with diverse populations, including individuals experiencing anxiety, depression, trauma, substance use disorders, relationship issues, and other mental health challenges.

Many mental health counselors specialize in particular areas of practice, such as working with children and adolescents, veterans, individuals with severe mental illness, or those recovering from trauma. The amount of time spent counseling each client varies depending on the severity of the issues being addressed and the size of the counselor's caseload. Some counselors may work intensively with a small number of clients, while others may manage larger caseloads, providing ongoing support to individuals at various stages of their mental health journey.

Mental health counselors are committed to staying informed about the latest research and best practices in the field, ensuring they provide the highest quality care to their clients. They often engage in continuous professional development and may collaborate with other mental health professionals to offer comprehensive care.

Career Outlook for Mental Health Counselors

According to the latest data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), job opportunities for mental health counselors are expected to grow significantly. Employment in this field is projected to increase by 18% from 2022 to 2032, which is much faster than the average growth rate for all occupations. This growth is driven by a rising demand for mental health services, increased awareness of mental health issues, and expanded access to mental health care.

The BLS estimates that there will be approximately 42,000 job openings annually for substance abuse, behavioral disorder, and mental health counselors over the next decade. These opportunities arise not only from new job creation but also from the need to replace workers who retire or leave the profession.

Mental health counselors are increasingly needed in a variety of settings, including outpatient mental health and substance abuse centers, hospitals, private practices, and community health organizations. This demand is also bolstered by greater recognition of the importance of mental health services in managing conditions such as anxiety, depression, and stress, as well as the integration of mental health services into broader healthcare practices.

Our Program's History

The Department of Human Services and Educational Leadership within the Perkins College of Education has a long and evolving history. Initially established in 1940 as the Department of English of Speech, this department was created 17 years after the founding of Stephen F. Austin State University. Over the years, the department underwent several name changes: in 1947, it became the Department of English, Library Service, Speech, and Journalism, and in 1950, it was renamed the Department of Speech. This title remained until 1969, when it briefly became the Department of School Services. In 1970, the department was split into two entities: the Department of School Services and the Department of Speech, which operated concurrently until 1972, after which the Department of School Services continued independently. In 1981, the department was renamed the Department of Counseling and Special Education, and in 1988, it became the Department of Counseling and Special Educational Programs. This designation lasted until 1999, when it was renamed the Department of Human Services, a name it held until 2019, when it was rebranded as the Department of Human Services and Educational Leadership.

The Master of Arts (MS) program in Professional Counseling at Stephen F. Austin State University was initiated in 1981 with the aim of training mental health counselors, school counselors, and rehabilitation counselors in East Texas. As of the current academic year, the program has narrowed its focus exclusively to training mental health counselors. Offered by the Department of Human Services and Educational Leadership in the James I. Perkins College of Education, the program emphasizes the integration of theory, skill, and practical application in mental health counseling. Students are rigorously prepared through a combination of coursework and hands-on experience, including a 100-hour supervised in-house practicum (with 40 clock-hours of direct service) and a 600-hour supervised external internship (with 240 clock-hours of direct service). The MS in Professional Counseling is a 60-semester-hour program and is nationally accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling Related Educational Programs (CACREP).

Program Highlights

The Professional Counseling Program at SFA is designed to provide a comprehensive and supportive educational experience. Students benefit from manageable class sizes, allowing for personalized attention and meaningful interactions with faculty. The modified cohort model ensures that students admitted in the same semester progress through the program together, fostering a collaborative learning environment.

The program offers an excellent on-site training clinic where students can apply their knowledge in real-world settings, gaining valuable experience under the supervision of experienced professionals. The approachable faculty maintain an open-door policy, providing students with easy access to guidance and mentorship throughout their studies.

The curriculum is structured to accommodate busy schedules, with students typically taking two face-to-face classes and one online class during the Spring and Fall semesters. During the summer, students enroll in one online class in each of two back-to-back summer sessions. This balanced approach to course delivery allows students to manage their time effectively while progressing through the program.

Overall, the Professional Counseling Program at SFA is designed to equip students with the skills, knowledge, and support they need to succeed in the counseling profession, making it an excellent choice for those seeking a fulfilling and impactful career.

Mission

The mission of the Clinical Mental Health Counseling Program is to provide high quality academic and clinical training experiences for the purpose of developing licensed professional counselors who are prepared to serve the needs of a diverse client population. Program graduates will demonstrate competence in providing a wide variety of counseling services using evidence-based practices.

Objectives

Academic Excellence: Ensure students receive high-quality academic training by providing rigorous coursework, comprehensive theoretical knowledge and practical skill development in counseling principles and techniques.

Clinical Competence: Equip students with the necessary clinical skills and experience through supervised clinical training and practicum opportunities to effectively assess, diagnose and provide evidence-based counseling interventions to diverse client populations.

Cultural Competency: Foster cultural competence among students to understand and address the unique needs of diverse client populations, including but not limited to differences in ethnicity, culture, socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, and ability.

Professional Licensure Preparedness: Prepare students for licensure as professional counselors by ensuring they meet all academic, clinical, and ethical requirements necessary for licensure, and by providing guidance and support throughout the licensure application process.

Matriculation Requirements

Upon admission to the program, you will receive information about the new student orientation (NSO), a mandatory meeting right before the beginning of your first semester in our program. You will be provided in the acceptance letter with the name of your advisor as well as information about NSO. At NSO, you will complete your degree plan and faculty will go over the degree map, which is a prescribed sequence of courses. The degree map is based upon taking 9 hours per long semester (Fall & Spring). If you switch from full time to part time or from part time to full time you will need to meet with your advisor to help you adjust your degree map.

After you complete 12 to 18 hours in the program, you will submit a candidacy application to the Professional Counseling Program and then have a candidacy appointment with our program's faculty. At the appointment, faculty will discuss with you your performance in the program and offer assistance in case you are struggling. This meeting will also afford you the opportunity to provide feedback on areas of program strength and suggestions for improvement. Upon successful completion of candidacy, you will be able to move forward in the program as a candidate for the Masters of Arts in Professional Counseling degree.

The next step is your fieldwork experience, ie., the practicum at our counseling clinic. All required applications for fieldwork must be submitted on time. Failure to do so could result in a delay in your graduation. Courses required before one is approved for practicum are listed on the practicum application. Additionally, during practicum, you will need to successfully complete comprehensive exams to be eligible to register and complete internship. All required forms must be completed in a timely manner and all deadlines must be adhered to (e.g., applications for field placements). All other policies relative to your degree completion and matriculation as a graduate student must be met as well. It is important for students to register early in the process for courses they need. Courses with insufficient enrollment are subject to cancelation by university administration.

The Professional Counseling Program

The Professional Counseling Program includes the following:

Core Classes (3 credit hours each):

PCOU 5310 Survey of Abnormalities
PCOU 5320 Professional Orientation
PCOU 5323 Legal and Ethical Issues
PCOU 5325 Career Development and Counseling
PCOU 5328 Group Counseling
PCOU 5331 Theories of Counseling
PCOU 5333 Counseling Skills and Techniques
PCOU 5335 Multicultural Counseling

PCOU 5341 Seminar in Counseling Research
PCOU 5359 Assessment in Counseling
PCOU 5385 Lifespan Development
PCOU 5391 Mental Health Psychopathology

Emphasis Classes (3 credit hours each):

PCOU 5321 Alcohol and Drug Abuse
PCOU 5322 Family Counseling
PCOU 5330 Crisis Counseling
PCOU 5339 Business Counseling Practice

Elective Class (3 credit hours):

PCOU 5329 Child and Adolescent (This class can be replaced with other elective with the approval by the program faculty.)

Specialization Areas:

PCOU 5394 Practicum in Counseling (3 credit hours)
PCOU 5395 Internship in Counseling (6 credit hours)

The current class rotation is provided in the appendices.

Accreditation

The Professional Counseling Program is accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). The current CACREP accreditation is from 2016-2024.

Financial Assistance

Financial Assistance For Domestic Students

Domestic students applying to the Professional Counseling Program at Stephen F. Austin State University (SFASU) have access to a variety of financial assistance options. These include federal financial aid such as grants, loans, and work-study opportunities, available through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Additionally, SFASU offers a range of scholarships for students in the College of Education, based on academic performance, financial need, and other criteria. Notably, recipients of SFASU scholarships of at least \$1,000 are eligible for in-state tuition rates, regardless of their state of residence. Students are encouraged to explore these options through the university's Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships, and they may also apply for graduate assistantships, which provide stipends and tuition benefits.

Financial Assistance For Domestic Students

International students applying to the Professional Counseling Program at SFASU can also benefit from various financial assistance opportunities. While they are not eligible for federal financial aid, international students may apply for scholarships offered by SFASU, including those specifically designed for international students. International students who receive a scholarship of at least \$1,000 from SFASU are eligible for in-state tuition rates. Additionally, international students can seek on-campus employment, including graduate assistantships, which offer financial support through stipends and tuition benefits. The Office of International Programs at SFASU provides guidance on available financial aid and scholarship options, helping international students find the resources they need to fund their education.

Faculty and Staff



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Professional Counseling Program Learning Outcomes

Professional Orientation and Ethical Practice (CACREP 2.F.1)

Students articulate the elements related to professional identity including the history and philosophy of the counseling profession, the value of professional organizations, the need for legal and ethical practice, and advocating for the profession and clients that are served.

Specialization Areas: Social and Cultural Diversity (CACREP 2.F.2)

Students demonstrate multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills necessary for competency in working with a diverse population.

Human Growth and Development (CACREP 2.F.3)

Students differentiate the development across the lifespan and the impact on normal and abnormal functioning.

Career Development (CACREP 2.F.4)

Students analyze career development theory in the development of individualized and developmentally appropriate career development activities and interventions.

Counseling and Helping Relationships (CACREP 2.F.5)

Students apply the skills necessary to engage in an effective and therapeutic helping relationship.

Group Counseling and Group Work (CACREP 2.F.6)

Students demonstrate competency in preparing and facilitation of group counseling.

Assessment and Treatment Planning (CACREP 2.F.7)

Students identify effective assessment strategies to facilitate treatment planning.

Research and Program Evaluation (CACREP 2.F.8)

Students evaluate research methods to inform evidence-based practice.

Admissions to the Professional Counseling Program

Clear Admission

All students who meet the admission requirements are encouraged to apply to the Program. Students are required to have an overall 2.7 GPA on a 4.0 scale for clear admission to study in the Professional Counseling Program. For "clear" admission to study in the Professional Counseling Program, students must have an overall 3.0 GPA. A student entering under "clear" admission status must maintain a 3.0 GPA. If a grade of C results in bringing a student's semester GPA under 3.0, he or she will be placed on probation and must raise his or her GPA over 3.0 the next semester to continue. If not, dismissal will result the following semester.

The application deadlines for admission into the program are as follows:

March 1: Fall Admission

October 1: Spring Admission

Applications that were not completed before the above stated deadlines will not be considered for enrollment until the following semester. Students must contact the Graduate School at gschool@sfasu.edu to adjust their semester of admission.

Provisional Admission

Students who have an overall undergraduate or graduate GPA between 2.5 to 2.69 on a 4.0 scale, and do therefore not meet the minimum admission requirements, may be considered for provisional admission. Students must earn a B or higher in classes to remain in the program. If their overall GPA is less than 3.0 during their first semester in the Professional Counseling Program, they will be dismissed from the program.

Transfer of Credits

Students who transfer to SFASU from a different university may transfer 9-12 credit hours. The hours must be reviewed and approved by the Professional Counseling Faculty to ensure they meet CACREP Standards and match with the courses offered at SFA. Skills courses cannot be transferred. This included skills and techniques, group counseling, practicum, and internship. Once the credit hours are approved a transfer credit form must be completed.

Requirements, Retention, and Readmission

Students in the Professional Counseling Program must meet specific requirements to gain and maintain their admission status. If a student fails to enroll in either a Spring or Fall semester, they must submit a letter of petition and request for re-entry to continue in the program.

Provisional Admission: Students with an undergraduate or graduate GPA between 2.5 and 2.69 may be granted provisional admission. These students can enroll in up to 9 hours of graduate study and must achieve no less than a B in each course to continue in the program. If successful, their status will change to clear admission. However, receiving a grade of C or lower while on provisional status results in suspension from the program.

Academic Performance: Students are expected to maintain a GPA of 3.0 or higher throughout the program. A GPA drop below 3.0 triggers academic probation, and students must meet with their advisor to develop a plan for improvement. If a student receives three grades of C, regardless of their overall GPA, they will be dismissed from the university. Additionally, a grade of D or F in any core graduate course results in indefinite suspension from the program and loss of any academic grants or stipends.

Readmission and Appeals: Suspended students may appeal for re-entry to the program after a minimum one-semester suspension. If re-admitted, they must retake the failed course and work with their advisor to establish a retention plan.

Grades Withheld: Students must resolve any grades of WH (Grade Withheld) by the following semester. Failure to do so will result in the Incomplete being converted to a D or F on their transcript. In extenuating circumstances, students may request an extension from the course instructor, though such requests are not guaranteed to be approved.

Comprehensive Exams: Students are required to pass a comprehensive exam, typically in their final semester, to complete the program. Eligibility to sit for this exam also requires a minimum GPA of 3.0. If the GPA falls below 3.0, students must develop a plan with their

advisor to improve their academic standing and ensure successful completion of the degree.

These policies are designed to maintain high academic standards and ensure that students are adequately prepared for professional practice in counseling.

Advising

Upon admission to the Professional Counseling Program, students are assigned a faculty advisor, as communicated via e-mail from the Professional Counseling administrative assistant. The advisor plays a crucial role in helping students navigate their academic journey, including completing a degree map, developing a course schedule, and selecting classes each semester.

Students are encouraged to contact their advisor before registration opens, as faculty may not be available between semesters. Timely advising is important since some courses have enrollment caps, and delayed advising may result in missing out on desired classes.

The advising relationship is collaborative, with students expected to actively engage with their advisor each semester. This includes confirming course selections and planning out the course of study at the beginning of the program. During the first full semester, students must meet with their advisor to finalize their degree plan, which outlines when each class should be taken.

Effective communication is essential for student success. Students should contact their advisor at least once each semester to ensure proper course registration and other academic matters.

Since advisors are also full-time faculty with other responsibilities, students should allow up to three workdays for a response to e-mails. Proper e-mail etiquette and timely communication are important to avoid issues like late registration and delayed course prerequisite approvals.

If a student feels that a different advisor would better suit their needs, they may request a reassignment by scheduling an appointment with the Program Coordinator or the Department Chair (if the Program Coordinator is their current advisor).

Professional Performance Development Evaluation

Students in the program are evaluated annually on various aspects of their professional development, including clinical competence, academic performance, and professional disposition. This evaluation occurs during the Spring semester, with all faculty participating in a systematic assessment. Students receive feedback during an advisement session before the end of the academic year.

Clinical Performance Self-Evaluation: Students must complete a self-assessment of their clinical skills at the beginning and end of PCOU 5391 Mental Health Psychopathology and mid-term and final evaluations during PCOU 5394 Practicum in Counseling and PCOU 5395 Internship in Counseling. These assessments are conducted using the Student Clinical Performance Self-Evaluation Form and the Clinical Site Supervisor Evaluation of Student, as detailed in the Program Handbook.

Academic Performance Evaluation: Students' academic performance is evaluated based on their GPA. Maintaining satisfactory academic progress is crucial for continuing in the program.

Professional Disposition: Graduate faculty evaluate students' professional dispositions each Spring semester using the Professional Counseling Student Professional Disposition Evaluation. This evaluation considers attributes such as interpersonal skills, ethical behavior, and professional conduct.

Comprehensive Exam: In addition to ongoing evaluations, students must pass the Comprehensive Examination (CPCE) to demonstrate mastery of core counseling knowledge. The CPCE is a 160-question exam covering key content areas and is typically taken during the practicum semester. Students must pass this exam to continue in the program and eventually qualify for licensure. The exam assesses students' readiness for professional practice and provides valuable feedback on their strengths and areas needing improvement. This systematic evaluation process ensures that students develop the necessary skills and dispositions to succeed in the counseling profession.

Progression to Candidacy

The Admission to Candidacy is a formal evaluation that occurs at the completion of 15 to 18 hours or after completing two semesters. Candidacy is only completed during fall and spring semesters. Students must make an application for candidacy and obtain the signature of their advisor. The Candidacy Committee will be comprised of at least two faculty members. During this interview, the student and the Committee will review the student's academic progress, counseling dispositions, and address any personal issues that may be of concern (Questions that may be asked are attached in Appendices. Additionally, questions may be asked as well). The purpose of the interview is to recommend continuation in the program or determine areas of improvement needed to continue. Students who successfully complete the Admission to Candidacy will also be required to complete a degree plan. Students who are not admitted to candidacy will be given a remediation plan and a time frame for completion. Students who are denied admission to candidacy may sit for the interview one additional time. If admission is denied a second time, the student will not be allowed to continue in the program. The following areas are considered for admission to candidacy:

Academic Progress: Students must demonstrate adequate academic progress to be admitted to candidacy. The program allows a maximum of two grades of C. Upon receiving a third C or a grade lower than a C in any course, the student will be dismissed from the program. Courses may be repeated to improve grades, but this does not remove the original C from the record when assessing academic progress. Additionally, students must earn a grade of B or higher in prerequisite courses before enrolling in subsequent courses. A GPA of 3.0 or above must be maintained to continue in the program. Falling below a 3.0 GPA results in academic probation for one semester; failure to raise the GPA to 3.0 within that semester leads to academic suspension, during which the student cannot enroll in classes for at least one semester.

Counselor Dispositions: The counseling profession requires strong interpersonal and communication skills, along with respect for individual values and beliefs. Faculty continuously evaluate students' fitness for the profession, addressing concerns as they arise. Each semester, faculty members complete a Student Evaluation Scale to identify early issues, which are communicated to the student's advisor. If concerns escalate, a Performance Fitness Evaluation is conducted, and a remediation plan is developed. Students are given opportunities to demonstrate growth, but failure to meet remediation goals or a persistent lack of professional fitness may result in dismissal from the program.

Personal Issues: Training or learning materials may occasionally trigger personal issues that affect a student's effectiveness as a counseling student or counselor. In such cases, students may be required to seek individual counseling. Counseling services are available to students at no cost through SFASU Counseling and Career Services.

Inappropriate Behavior: Inappropriate behavior towards peers or faculty, often triggered by personal issues, may indicate a student is unfit for collaboration or unable to accept feedback. Such behavior can interfere with a student's ability to function effectively as a counseling student or counselor. When this occurs, faculty may require the student to seek individual counseling. Persistent or severe issues, including violations of professional ethics or the SFASU Code of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity (see: <https://www.sfasu.edu/docs/hops/04-106.pdf>), can lead to dismissal from the program. All students are expected to adhere to the ethical standards of the American Counseling Association.

Program Application Deadlines

Deadlines for applications are e-mailed to students each semester. Those deadlines include Candidacy application, Practicum application, and Internship application. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of deadlines and adhere to them. Failure to meet the deadlines can result in delaying your progress through the program. Deadlines are:

September 1:

- Fall Candidacy
- Spring Practicum
- Spring Internship

February 1:

- Spring Candidacy
- Summer Practicum
- Fall Internship

June 1:

- Fall Practicum

Communication of Program Information

All program communications occur through the SFASU e-mail system. Students must monitor their SFASU e-mail account on a regular basis. Students can forward their SFASU e-mail to another e-mail account to consolidate accounts for more efficient monitoring. Be aware that some employer e-mail systems may block the SFASU e-mail or identify it as spam.

Experiential Process

Group Participation

According to CACREP, students are required to attend a group counseling experience for a minimum of 10 hours. Students are required to participate in a group counseling experience as a requirement of PCOU 5328. The group will be held after scheduled class and will be facilitated by an independent counselor.

Counseling Clinic

The Counseling Clinic is a university-based training program which provides counseling services and professional training opportunities for graduate counseling students and quality service provision for the client. The SFASU Counseling Clinic provides graduate counseling students the opportunity to gain practical experience as a counselor in a supervised clinical setting.

The Counseling Clinic is a service provided by the Professional Counseling Program. It is a training clinic in which services are provided by graduate students who are in the Practicum and Internship portion of their education. All services are supervised by a Licensed Professional Counselor. The Counseling Clinic combines a therapeutic and community focus which offers a full continuum of counseling care. The service is geared to each person's needs. A client's progress is based on the person's ability to move through counseling according to individual readiness.

The program serves children, adolescents, and adults who are experiencing personal problems. They provide services that include individual, group, family, and couples counseling. Additional information is provided at the following link [Counseling Clinic](#).

Practicum Requirements

The practicum can only be taken after completing PCOU 5320 Professional Orientation in Counseling, PCOU 5331 Theories of Counseling, and PCOU 5333 Counseling Skills and Techniques. Students must maintain an overall GPA of 3.0 in these courses and complete a minimum of 39 semester hours. Practicum students are enrolled in PCOU 5394 Practicum in Counseling and are required to complete a minimum of 100 clock hours, 40 of which must include direct client contact.

Practicum

All students will complete a supervised practicum at the SFASU Counseling Clinic. This practicum requires a minimum of 100 hours, with at least 40 hours of direct services to clients from the community or SFASU students. To ensure continuity of care, students will remain with their assigned clients until the transition period is complete. Practicum students must complete 8-10 hours per week in the clinic, which may result in hours exceeding the minimum requirements. During the practicum semester, students will be assigned clients from the clinic and will engage in counseling sessions with those clients. The client load will depend on the current caseload of the clinic and the number of students enrolled in the practicum. Counseling sessions will be videotaped using the Clinic Valt system.

Students will have one hour of individual supervision with the Clinic Director, during which videos will be reviewed. Additionally, students will participate an average of 1½ hours of group supervision per week during the practicum semester. This is an intense semester that requires being on campus several days a week. The practicum experience will begin approximately two weeks before the end of the previous semester. A transition meeting will be held where current practicum students meet with incoming students to transition caseloads. The incoming counselor-in-training (CIT) will co-facilitate client sessions with the outgoing CIT for the last few sessions to ensure a smooth transition and continuity of care for the client. For more information, please review the Practicum Handbook when you enroll in the course.

The Comprehensive Exam

All candidates for graduate degrees in the Professional Counseling Program are required to successfully pass the Comprehensive Examination (CPCE) to demonstrate mastery of their coursework content. The CPCE serves multiple purposes, including assessing the quality of the program's training, providing individual feedback to students, and comparing student performance to national standards.

Examination Details: The CPCE, developed by the Center for Credentialing and Education (CCE), consists of 160 multiple-choice questions covering eight core content areas:

1. Human Growth and Development
2. Social and Cultural Diversity
3. Counseling and Helping Relationships
4. Group Counseling and Group Work
5. Career Development
6. Assessment and Training
7. Research and Program Evaluation
8. Professional Counseling Orientation and Ethical Practice

Each section contains 20 questions, 17 of which are scored. The remaining three are pretest items used for statistical purposes and are not identified to the student. The exam provides a detailed breakdown of scores for each section, helping students identify areas where further study or improvement may be needed. The total time allotted for the exam is 3 hours and 45 minutes.

The CPCE is designed to give programs an objective view of the knowledge level of their students, allowing them to examine student functioning across various curricular areas. It encourages longitudinal self-study, compares students' performance to national data, and provides feedback on individual strengths and weaknesses. For students, the CPCE stimulates the integration of knowledge learned in separate courses and offers valuable insights for academic and professional development.

Registration and Fees: Students must register for the CPCE and pay a registration fee, as well as an additional fee for the SFASU testing center. The exam is administered on campus every semester, typically around mid-semester during long semesters and in late June or early July during the summer. The specific administration dates and application deadlines are publicized each semester.

Eligibility and Attempts: To be eligible to take the CPCE, students must have an overall GPA of 3.0 or higher on at least 75% (i.e., 45 semester credit hours) of the graduate coursework completed. Once deemed eligible, students will receive further instructions on how to register, pay for, and sit for the exam.

If a student fails the CPCE on the first attempt, they may retake the exam one time during the next administration within the same semester. The exam can be taken a maximum of two times. If a student fails to obtain a satisfactory score after two attempts, they will be ineligible for graduation and will be dropped from the Professional Counseling Program. Unfortunately, this also renders the student ineligible to obtain a graduate degree from SFASU.

Results: The Professional Counseling Program has set the passing score on the comprehensive examination at a raw score of 78. Students must meet this requirement to move on in their degree and enroll in PCOU 5395 Internship. Scores for each section, along with a total score, will be reported to the program. Additionally, the CPCE provides statistics on the program's students and national data, helping to maintain or improve the quality of the counseling program.

To maximize the odds of passing the comprehensive examination, students are encouraged to keep all course materials, such as PowerPoints and notes, from each class taken during the Professional Counseling program. Many students find it helpful to use CPCE study guides, take practice exams, and form study groups. There is also overlap between CPCE content and the National Counselor Examination (NCE), so reviewing materials designed for the NCE can be beneficial. Students will be notified by the Program Coordinator of their results as soon as they become officially available. For more information about the CPCE, please visit the following link:

<https://www.cce-global.org/assessmentsandexams/cpce>

The passing score on the CPCE is a raw score of 78. Students must meet this requirement to move onto and enroll in PCOU 5395 Internship.

Field Experience

Internship Requirements

As part of the Master of Arts in Professional Counseling program, students are required to complete a 600-hour supervised internship in an approved mental health treatment setting. The internship is the final phase of the degree process, which is typically undertaken after completing all coursework except one course or with the permission of a faculty advisor.

Preparation and Placement: Approximately eight weeks before the internship semester begins, the Internship Coordinator will contact students and provide a clinical placement packet, which includes orientation materials, approval forms, and a list of approved agencies for field experience. Students are responsible for contacting their preferred agencies to inquire about interviews, resumes, and any other preliminary requirements, such as background checks or specific training.

Students must choose their internship sites with prior approval from the Field/Clinical Experience Coordinator, in consultation with the Master's Program Coordinator. The selected site must have an Affiliation Agreement with SFASU. Students must also receive clearance from the Master's Program Coordinator to register for the internship course.

Eligibility:

- Students must complete the Practicum and have at least 45 semester hours of coursework completed before beginning the internship.
- A minimum GPA of 3.0 is required at the time of starting the internship.
- Students who are unsure about site selection or the type of experience they should pursue are encouraged to meet with the Field/Clinical Experience Coordinator at least eight weeks prior to the internship semester.

Internship Completion Options: Students have two options to complete the internship requirement:

- **Option 1:** Take PCOU 5395 Internship (3 credit hours) over two semesters, repeating the course to fulfill the 600-hour clinical/field experience requirement.
- **Option 2:** Take PCOU 5395 Internship (6 credit hours) in one semester to fulfill the 600-hour requirement. Please note that taking PCOU 5395 Internship (6 credit hours) alongside additional didactic courses is not permitted.

Internship

Students are required to participate in internships during their last semester. The internship is six credit hours and requires a total of 600 hours, 240 direct and 360 indirect. The internship is an intensive field-based experience for candidates in the Professional Counseling Program.

Candidates concentrate their experiences in settings appropriate to their program. Placements occur in a variety of community agencies, private-practice facilities, schools, colleges, hospitals, non-profit organizations, or state agencies. Students will work with Practicum/Internship Coordinator to obtain and approve an internship site and get a completed affiliation agreement. A qualified onsite supervisor (must have a master's degree and a license and have been practicing for a minimum of two years in the field) must be available for one hour of weekly supervision and consultation as needed. In addition, interns will meet with the Internship Faculty for one and a half hours of group supervision. The internship may or may not provide compensation. Students should plan for necessary financial resources prior to the internship semester.

A list of current approved sites can be obtained from the Practicum/Internship Coordinator. Application for internship and approval for placement are required prior to registration. Candidates must have successfully completed the required practicum experience and received a passing score on comprehensive examinations prior to enrolling in internship. Students need to register for 3 or 6 hours of internship depending upon the number of hours they plan to complete. Three hours equates to 120 direct client contact hours and 180 indirect hours. Six hours equates to 240 direct client contact hours and 360 indirect hours. Enrollment is not retroactive so register for what one plans to complete. Additionally, registering for 6 hours but completing significantly less (less than 75 percent of required hours) may result in failing the course. WH grades (i.e., grades withheld) are only granted in extenuating circumstance and require the approval of the course instructor and department chair. Failure to plan to complete hours is not considered an extenuating circumstance. For more information, please review the Internship Handbook when you enroll in the course.

Counseling Licensure

Background Checks

Students should be aware that the certification and licensure process involves a background check. A history of conviction may result in the failure to be certified or licensed. It is the responsibility of the student to communicate with certification and licensure boards to determine whether their personal legal history will result in disqualification for certification or licensure. Additionally, practicum and internship sites may require background checks.

Licensure

The Master's Program in Professional Counseling at SFASU is nationally accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). This accreditation allows students to be eligible to sit for the National Counselor Exam (NCE) during their final semester of the program or after graduation. The NCE is a requirement for becoming a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) in Texas.

To obtain LPC licensure in Texas, graduates must also complete additional requirements beyond passing the NCE. These include completing 3,000 post-master's hours of supervised experience, with 1,500 of those hours involving direct client service. This supervision must be conducted by a licensed LPC supervisor in an approved setting.

The Texas Board of Examiners of Professional Counselors, designated by the Texas Legislature, is the licensing authority for individuals seeking to become LPCs in Texas. Anyone wishing to practice as an LPC must submit the appropriate credentials for evaluation and pass the required examination.

While graduates of the SFASU Master's Program in Professional Counseling are well-prepared with the educational qualifications needed to apply for LPC licensure in Texas, they must complete the required 3,000-hour internship under supervision to meet all licensure requirements. Students are strongly encouraged to contact the Texas State Board of Examiners of Professional Counselors directly to verify current licensure requirements, as these can change frequently. It is the student's responsibility to ensure they have the most up-to-date information.

For more details, students should consult the Texas State Board of Examiners of Professional Counselors at: <https://www.bhec.texas.gov/texas-state-board-of-examiners-of-professional-counselors/index.html>

Policy on Endorsement of Students

Students seeking recommendations for credentialing, licensure, or employment should directly contact the faculty members from whom they are requesting endorsements. Faculty will only recommend students who meet all the necessary standards for the certification, licensure, or position in question.

Faculty members providing endorsements must be familiar with the student's competencies, skill level, and ethical behavior. If a student does not meet the professional or ethical standards of the School or the counseling profession, an endorsement cannot be provided. Faculty may recommend graduates for employment for positions in which the

student meets the posting requirements and has demonstrated competence to perform the stated responsibilities.

Retention, Remediation, and Dismissal

Due Process

Students who are identified as at risk will have the opportunity to meet with the faculty to hear their concerns, provide additional information that may be relevant, and review the remediation plan. Students have the right to appeal the faculty decision to the Department Chair. Students wishing to appeal against the faculty decision will need to discuss the appeal process with the Department Chair.

Remediation Plan

If a student is deemed at risk of failure due to academic skills deficits, professional skills deficits, or personal issues that interfere with the ability to function in the role of a professional counselor, a remediation plan will be developed and implemented. Remediation can involve repeating classes, other required professional development activities, and attending personal counseling. The program faculty will develop the goals for the plan, identify the required target measures of accomplishment and documentation of goal attainment, and the timeframe for completion. Students who are mandated to attend personal counseling will be required to sign a release of information that will allow the faculty to obtain information about the number of sessions attended, willingness to address the identified concerns, and progress toward the identified goals. Personal information will not be shared with the faculty. Failure to complete the remediation plan will result in removal from the program.

Course Grade Appeals

The SFASU grade appeal policy, which can be found here, <https://www.sfasu.edu/docs/hops/04-109.pdf>, provides a formal process for students to appeal academic decisions. All relevant documentation under consideration at each step will be forwarded to the appropriate parties at the next procedural level. Any further appeal must be made within ten (10) business days from the conclusion of each step. Recommendations or decisions at each level are generally made within four weeks of receiving the appeal. The burden of proof rests with the student throughout the process.

A student may appeal a final grade if inappropriate criteria were used in determining the grade, the instructor did not adhere to stated procedures or grading standards, or other compelling reasons exist to change the grade. A student may not appeal due to general dissatisfaction with a final grade or disagreement with the instructor's professional judgment regarding the quality of the student's work.

It is important to distinguish grounds for grade appeal from questions about quality of instruction. Successful grade appeals must be based on evidence that the student performed at a level sufficient to warrant a different grade. It is important for students to bring to the instructor's and the department's attention perceived deficiencies in instruction, but these by themselves do not normally warrant a change in grade.

Aside from final grades, a student may appeal substantial and/or unjustified deviation from academic policies, procedures, and/or requirements.

Initial Appeal to the Instructor: The first step in the final course grade appeal process at Stephen F. Austin State University (SFA) requires the student to submit a written appeal to the instructor responsible for the grade. This appeal must be made within 30 calendar days after the first class day of the following semester, either fall or spring. The student must clearly demonstrate that the instructor did not adhere to stated procedures or grading standards, or provide other compelling reasons for the appeal. General dissatisfaction with the grade or disagreement with the instructor's professional judgment is not sufficient grounds for an appeal.

If the instructor is unavailable or there are extenuating circumstances, the academic unit head may grant an extension to this deadline. The instructor will review the appeal and engage with the student to attempt to resolve the issue. If the student is not satisfied with the outcome, they may escalate the appeal to the next level.

Appeal to the Academic Unit Head: If the student is not satisfied with the instructor's response, they may appeal in writing to the academic unit head. This step involves the academic unit head gathering written statements from both the student and the instructor. The academic unit head reviews the information provided and makes a written recommendation, which is communicated to both the student and the instructor.

Appeal to the Academic Dean: Should the dispute remain unresolved after the academic unit head's recommendation, the student has the option to appeal in writing to the academic dean. Upon receiving the appeal, the dean notifies both the student and the instructor of the continued appeal process. The dean may also request additional information or responses from the instructor.

At this stage, the dean may refer the appeal to the relevant college council for review. If the college council does not have student members, the dean may appoint up to two students recommended by the Student Government Association to participate as voting members. The college council reviews all relevant documentation and submits its recommendation to the dean, who then provides a written recommendation to the involved parties.

Final Appeal to the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs: If the issue is still not resolved after the dean's recommendation, the student may make a final written appeal to the provost and vice president for academic affairs. The provost, like the dean, may request additional information or responses from the parties involved. The provost may also consult the college council for advice on the matter.

The provost reviews all documentation and provides a final recommendation, which is communicated to the student, the instructor, and any other parties involved in the appeal process. This recommendation is generally considered final, and the appeal process concludes at this level.

Timelines and Deadlines: Throughout the appeal process, strict timelines are enforced. Students must submit their appeals within 10 business days from the conclusion of each step in the process. Recommendations at each level of appeal are typically made within four weeks of receiving the appeal. These timelines ensure that the appeal process is conducted efficiently and that all parties receive timely resolutions.

Faculty members are responsible for the evaluation of student course work conducted in their class and, under normal circumstances, are the sole judge of the grades assigned in their course.

Professional Organizations

A critical element of professional identity is related to association with the greater counseling profession. Students are required to join a professional organization upon entering the program and provide proof of membership. The Texas Counseling Association is the professional association representing counselors in the State of Texas. There are divisions within TCA that represent the specialty areas. There are also numerous national organizations including the American Counseling Association, and American Mental Health Counseling Association. Most professional organizations have reduced membership rates and conference rates for students. Attendance of at least one professional conference is encouraged during your period of enrollment.

TCA encourages student participation through volunteer service on committees or at conferences. The annual Professional Growth Conference is held in November and has activities and sessions specifically developed to meet the needs of graduate students. During legislative sessions, students are encouraged to participate in field trips to one of the three TCA Advocacy Days. In addition, Piney Woods Counseling Association is a chapter of TCA and holds 3 meetings each year in which professional development credits can be obtained.

Expectations of Students

Students are expected to abide by all policies in this handbook and all university policies. Students are expected to meet with their advisors, complete all forms in a timely fashion and demonstrate professional behaviors in classes and at fieldwork sites. Students are expected to embrace a professional counselor identity and follow the ethical codes and rules and regulations within Texas for counselors. Students are expected to be committed to learning and academic excellence and to meet all established deadlines. Students are expected to actively address any personal issues that might impair their ability to be competent, ethical, and effective counseling students.

Personal Counseling Services

There are resources that students can utilize should they need counseling services and other assistance.

On-Campus Resources:

The Dean of Students Office (Rusk Building, 3rd floor lobby)

www.sfasu.edu/deanofstudents

E-mail: dos@sfasu.edu

Ph.: (936) 468-7249

SFASU Counseling Services

Health and Wellness Hub (at the corner of E. College and Raguet)

www.sfasu.edu/counselingservices

Ph.: (936) 468-2401

SFASU Human Services Counseling Clinic

www.sfasu.edu/humanservices/139.asp

Human Services Building, Room 202

Ph.: (936) 468-1041

To support the health and well-being of every Lumberjack, the Health and Wellness Hub offers comprehensive services that treat the whole person—mind, body and spirit.

www.sfasu.edu/thehub

thehub@sfasu.edu

Ph.: (936) 468-4008

Services include:

- Health Services.
- Counseling Services.
- Student Outreach and Support.
- Food Pantry.

- Wellness Coaching.
- Alcohol and Other Drug Education

Off-Campus Resources:

Burke Mental Health Services
24-hour Crisis Line
Ph.: (800) 392-8343

National Suicide Prevention
Ph.: 988

Suicide Prevention Lifeline
Ph.: (800) 273-8255 (TALK)

Crisis Text Line
Text HELLO to 741-741

Disability Services

To obtain disability-related accommodations, alternate formats, and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), Human Services Building, and Room 325, 468-3004 / 468-1004 (TDD) as early as possible in the semester. Once verified, ODS will notify the course instructor and outline the accommodation and/or auxiliary aids to be provided. Failure to request services promptly may delay your accommodations. For additional information, go to <http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/>.

Time Limitations

To ensure that graduates are trained in the most current professional environment, SFASU requires completion of the master's degree within a six-year period. Coursework that is prior to the six-year period will not be accepted for credit. Students can request a review of the content of the course syllabus to determine whether it encompasses current professional knowledge. Students will also be asked to demonstrate retention of the knowledge.

Timeline for Required Actions

at Action to be Taken:	What Action Should be Taken:	Where to Secure Forms/Infor mation:	Whom to See:
Develop class schedule and complete degree plan	After notice of admission.	Advisor will provide current degree map	Faculty Advisor will be assigned to each student
Attend mandatory New Student Orientation	Check e-mail for important dates and locations for New Student Orientation.	Receive an e-mail from the Program Coordinator about dates and times	Program Coordinator
Apply for Admission to Candidacy	After completing 15 -18 semester hours of graduate work.	Forms are available from administrative assistant – e-mail counselingprogram@sfasu.edu	Administrative Assistant
Apply for Practicum	Prior to application deadline semester before enrollment.	Forms are available from administrative assistant – e-mail counselingprogram@sfasu.edu	Administrative Assistant
Prepare for Comprehensive Exam	Comprehensive Exam (CPCE) is taken during enrollment of practicum.	Practicum Instructor will help with sign up process for CPCE	Practicum Instructor
Apply for Internship	Prior to application deadline semester before enrollment. For fall internship apply by Feb 1, for Spring internship apply by Sept 1.	Forms are available from administrative assistant – e-mail counselingprogram@sfasu.edu	Administrative Assistant

Complete endorsement for LPC in Texas	Students must have signature from Practicum/Internship Coordinator for LPC endorsement.	BHEC forms for LPC Application	https://www.bhec.texas.gov/
Apply for graduation, pay graduation fee	By deadline in current Graduate School Bulletin.	SFASU Website	Registrar
Purchase cap and gown	Mid semester during last semester of enrollment.	Campus Bookstore	Campus Bookstore

(3) Matriculation requirements.