

**Student Competency to Practice**  
**Master of Arts in Counseling**  
**Eastern Mennonite University**

**Program ethical responsibilities**

Counselor education programs have an ethical and legal obligation to assess student competency to practice, and to remediate or sanction impaired student counselors. The ACA Code of Ethics mandates that counselor educators and supervisors monitor student progress in the areas of both professional and personal development. CACREP standards state that it is the responsibility of faculty to counsel out students who are inappropriate for the profession.

**Students are informed of expectations**

Applicants and new students are informed of the Master of Arts in Counseling expectations and standards through information published in the counseling student handbook. (General university policies and disciplinary procedures are published in the Graduate Catalog). The counseling student handbook addresses the importance of counselor formation, noting that the performance of the student through this counselor formation process forms the basis on which the faculty assesses the professional [eg. counselor presence, emotional maturity and capacity to cultivate collaboration, solidarity, and positive cohort and faculty relationships] and clinical competencies required for admission to internship and graduation. These expectations are specified in the comprehensive student objectives given in the handbook, and in the assessment section of the handbook, which addresses coursework, writing standards, and the Counselor Assessment Scale (CAS).

**Students receive ongoing evaluation**

The counseling student handbook also describes the various ongoing screening and evaluation procedures faculty and supervisors use to assess student counselor competence. The faculty meets regularly (three times each semester) to review the performance of all students in practicum or internship placements. At the end of practicum, and before internship work is begun, each student must be admitted to internship, a process relying heavily on practicum site supervisor feedback and utilizing the CAS assessment. During practicum and internship, students meet weekly with individual site supervisors and faculty group supervisors to review their work.

**Admission to Internship**

The admission to internship process and decision are the responsibility of the faculty. Students are informed of the admission to internship requirement and process in the student handbook, which is introduced during orientation to the program and carefully reviewed in the advising session during the student's first semester. Each student will have participated in the evaluation process through individual site supervision, the written evaluation of the site supervisor and consultation between the faculty group supervisor and the individual site supervisor, through discussions with faculty regarding class performance, through advising conferences, and through the invitation to submit a self-review as part of the admission to internship process. Such processes are deemed sufficient for the faculty to make a final decision. However, the faculty can, as it chooses, solicit additional input from the student, or any other consultant. The admission to internship decision process preempts the further stages of process as detailed in the remainder of this document.

**Student difficulties are reviewed by faculty**

The faculty considers the student as a whole person, and realizes that a student may have difficulty developing in the areas stated above. Insofar as such difficulties reflect a lack of a student's qualifications or potential to become a competent and ethical professional, those difficulties are

reviewed by the faculty. Concerns about a student may come from the student, staff, faculty, field training supervisors and/or other students, and be reported through grades and/or written or verbal evaluations. A student's personal characteristics, interpersonal manner, social skills, and emotional makeup which may interfere with his or her ability to function professionally will be addressed in both academic and practice settings.

### **Definition of Academic/Problematic Behavior**

As addressed in the recent article regarding graduate student impairment, Wolf, Green, Nochajski, and Kost (2014) identify a definition of impairment first articulated by Lamb, Presser, Pfof, Baum, Jackson, and Jarvis (1987) and amended by Bemak et al. (1999) to include students. The definition includes the following:

- 1) An inability and/or unwillingness to acquire and integrate professional standards into one's repertoire of professional behavior
- 2) An inability to acquire professional skills in order to reach an acceptable level of competency
- 3) An inability to control personal stress, psychological dysfunction, and/or excessive emotional reactions that interfere with professional functioning (Lamb et al., 1987).
- 4) An inability to insightfully understand and resolve their own issues so that these issues do not interfere with the their clinical role (Bemak et al., 1999).

### **Difficulties are addressed informally**

If at any time the counseling faculty identify that a student is having educational or professionally related difficulties, the preferred action would be:

- (1) For the student and the involved faculty member to meet informally to discuss a remediation plan.
- (2) The student and faculty member will discuss the problem and try to outline ways to correct or rectify the problem.
- (3) This interaction process should allow the student ample opportunity to react to the information presented regarding a problem area.
- (4) The student should be made aware of the consequences of failure to remedy the problem.
- (5) The faculty (all faculty) will be advised of the situation, which will be recorded in the faculty minutes.

**Remediation** (adapted from *Progressive Remediation, Retention, and Dismissal Policy* – The Ohio State University Counselor Education Program).

Remediation plans may involve any or all of the following:

- A. For Academic Remediation:
  - a. Retaking courses [eg. not succeeding academically, repeated tardiness, 'C' in skills courses]

- b. Engaging in tutoring
  - c. Study skills training
  - d. Test-taking training
  - e. Writing lab assistance
  - f. Spoken and/or written language skills remediation
  - g. Other academic interventions, as deemed necessary and appropriate by the program faculty
- B. For Professional Skill Remediation
- a. Retaking courses (eg., skills courses, ethics, content courses)
  - b. Removal from placement site
  - c. Reassignment of placement site
  - d. Specific assigned activities in placement site
  - e. Writing reflection papers
  - f. Additional supervision meetings
  - g. Other professional skills interventions, as deemed necessary and appropriate by faculty
- C. For Personal Remediation
- a. Personal Counseling
  - b. Writing reflection papers
  - c. Writing apology letters
  - d. Additional supervision meetings
  - e. Other personal remediation interventions, as deemed necessary and appropriate by the program faculty

The remediation plan will include, at a minimum:

1. Specific activities to be completed
2. Target measures of accomplishment, which will be documented;
3. A schedule of regular meetings 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; and
5. Contact information for the faculty member for monitoring the student's Progress.

Copies of the plan will be retained by the student's advisor, the monitoring faculty member, the program director, and the student. The monitoring faculty member will also retain notes documenting all meetings with the student during the course of the remediation process.

### **Client safety issues are addressed immediately**

Occasionally there are field placement situations that require immediate action because the safety of one or more persons is in question or because the interests of one or more persons are in jeopardy. In this case, any of the involved parties may request that the student counselor not be allowed any client contact until the issues are satisfactorily resolved. The procedures described below should then be scheduled as expeditiously as possible so that there will be minimal disruption of the student's experience.

### **Formal probation or withdrawal processes**

In circumstances where informal attempts for rectifying the situation have been proven unsuccessful, it may be necessary to initiate a formal process for consideration of probation and/or enforced withdrawal from the program. The student's rights to a thorough, objective review, including representation of his/her own perspective, will be maintained. Documentation of the process will be kept in the program director's files, with copies of communications with the student kept in the student's files as well.

*The following process is described in detail to provide clear guidance. However, these process guidelines will in most cases be applied with some variance in procedure, following the spirit and intent of the guidelines as interpreted by the faculty, and the student involved is fully informed.*

### **Step 1.**

- a) The faculty member will again discuss the problem with the student, and notify the student's advisor of the situation.
- b) After the student has had the opportunity to discuss the problem with his or her advisor, a meeting will be held with the student's advisor, the program director, and the student, or the faculty and the student. (If the student's advisor is the program director, the faculty may elect another faculty member to participate in the meeting).
- c) The meeting date will be set so that the student will have the opportunity to provide additional evidence to the group for consideration at the meeting. Following any student input, the faculty present (which may be the full faculty) will determine to either give the student additional informal time (specified in writing) to remediate difficulties (described in writing), or refer the matter to the full faculty for formal probation or withdrawal processes.
- d) If, in the determination of this group, the problem persists after the specified remediation period, the process will proceed immediately to step 2.

### **Step 2.**

If formal probation or withdrawal processes need to be undertaken, a meeting of the faculty will be called. The student will be informed of the time of this meeting in advance and will have an opportunity to provide additional information or evidence to the faculty for consideration at the meeting, either in writing or in person.

The assessment of the situation may include but is not necessarily limited to:

- a) the opinions of experts on the faculty, field supervisors, and/or consultants to the faculty;
- b) the student's willingness to accept responsibility for the concerns in question, including the student's willingness to meaningfully engage in a remediation process;
- c) the extent to which continued enrollment of the student will place unreasonable or excessive demands upon other students or faculty of the program;
- d) the student's ability to function with clients as a trainee; and

e) an evaluation submitted to the faculty by the student's own consultant and/or outside consultant as requested by the faculty.

The faculty will come to consensus on whether the student should be placed on probation or dismissed from the program. The advisor and/or other designated persons will inform the student of the decision both orally and in writing. The student will be given the opportunity to respond orally and/or in writing to the recommendation.

### **Step 3.**

If the assessment in step two determines that the student should be placed on probation, a remediation plan will be developed and implemented for the student, which may include, in extreme cases, disciplinary action. Remedial interventions may include a recommendation of individual and/or group counseling and/or other appropriate educational, clinical, or field experience that may assist the student, as noted above.

Whenever a student is assigned a remediation plan, the student's advisor will meet with the student and provide in writing the following:

- a) A behavioral description of the problem;
- b) Possible courses of remediation;
- c) Criteria stated in behavioral terms for ending the probation status;
- d) A time frame for meeting these criteria;
- e) A summary of the options available to the student (e.g., appeals, dropping out, methods of remediation); and
- f) A detailed description of the consequences of not meeting criteria within the time frame. An attempt will be made to clarify all of these points with the student so there is an understanding on the student's part of the problem, the remediation options, the criteria for removal of the probationary status, and the time limits for completing the criteria.

If a student refuses the program faculty's attempt at remediation, the student may appeal to the Graduate Dean.

In the event that a student refuses to accept a remediation recommended by faculty and supported by the Graduate Dean, or fails to make adequate progress in addressing his or her impairment, the program may initiate formal disciplinary action either in conjunction with or independent of further attempts at remediation. While every attempt will be made to present the faculty's actions as educational rather than punitive, the faculty must take actions consistent with its professional responsibilities. Examples of such actions may include, but are not limited to:

- a) counseling the student to withdraw from his or her program of studies;
- b) placing the student on probation with academic continuation contingent on progress in remediation;

- c) placing the student on a required leave of absence from his or her program; and/or
- d) dismissing the student from his or her program of studies.

**Step 4.**

At the end of the remediation period, the program faculty will meet to review the student’s progress toward meeting the criteria for removal of the probationary status. The student will be informed of the meeting at least two weeks in advance and will have the opportunity to provide additional information or evidence to the committee either in person or in writing. A decision will be made to:

- a) Return the student to full graduate status;
- b) Continue the probation (which would necessitate preparation of another set of recommendations as specified above); or
- c) Initiate the student’s enforced withdrawal. The program director and the student’s advisor will inform the student, in a joint meeting, of the decision both verbally and in writing. The student will be given the opportunity to respond orally and/or in writing to this recommendation. Should the student file no response to the action, the action taken in this step will be considered as final. Appeals may be made to the Graduate Dean.

***Enforced withdrawal procedure***

If a student is recommended for enforced withdrawal, the advisor will meet with the student and provide both orally and in writing the following information:

- a) Specifications of the student behaviors that resulted in the recommendation for termination of his or her program of studies;
- b) A summary of the appeal options available to the student. An attempt will be made to clarify all of these points with the student so that there is an understanding on the student’s part of the reasons for the termination decision and the options available to him or her for appeal. The termination decision will be forwarded by the program director to the Graduate Dean. Alternative career paths and options will be discussed with students who are asked to leave the program.

Documentation of this process will be kept in the program director’s and advisor’s files, with appropriate documentation in the student’s file.

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**Questions about this policy are welcome and may be directed toward your advisor or the program director.**

I understand the terms of this policy and agree to abide by the terms outlined herein. I understand that I can obtain a copy of this policy from the Counselor Education website.

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Student Signature

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Date

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Student Name – Printed