

Student Grievance, Deficiency, & Dismissal Procedures

A quality graduate education program in Marriage and Family Therapy involves a shared faculty-student investment in the pursuit of professional education and training. The faculty recognize that their role is to mentor and coach students as they develop academic, clinical, and professional competencies. Ongoing professional relationships between and among faculty and students continually contribute to the development of such competencies. At times, students will struggle to develop necessary competencies, and faculty will employ additional focused efforts to assist students in their development. This document describes the recommended approach for resolving grievances among students, and between students and faculty, competencies students are expected to develop over the course of their graduate career, and the procedures that the faculty will implement when students struggle to develop these competencies.

Recommended Grievance Processes

Student Grievance: If a student has a problem with a fellow student, he or she is expected to follow the following procedures (for Title IX related grievances, students will follow University procedures <https://titleix.ua.edu/>):

- Initiate contact by means of a direct conversation with that student. The two parties will then attempt to resolve the conflict to the satisfaction of all concerned.
- If the aggrieved party has done this, come to a common understanding of the problem, and agreed upon a course of changed behavior, and the other individual continues to do the offending behavior, the aggrieved party still has the obligation to follow up with another direct conversation about the lack of change in behavior. In other words, the aggrieved individual is expected to initiate direct contact with the other individual involved and to persist in problem-solving discussions.
- If the offending behavior stops, the situation is resolved.
- If the offending behavior persists, the aggrieved person may, at that point, ask for one or more of the faculty to serve as mediator in the problem situation.

Faculty Grievance: The faculty of the HDFS Marriage and Family Therapy Concentration prioritizes open and honest communication between faculty and students. The following Grievance Policy addresses students who may at some time feel they have been unjustly treated by a faculty member. While it is recommended that students take the below steps to resolve the grievance, students can also follow the procedures outlined in the faculty handbook (<https://catalog.ua.edu/graduate/about/general-information/grievance-procedure-faculty-handbook/>):

- Contact the faculty member with whom you have a grievance and make an appointment to discuss the matter.
- If, after the meeting, you do not feel the matter was adequately resolved, you should meet with the MFT Program Director, or another MFT core faculty member if the grievance involves the Director, about the grievance.
- If, after meeting with the Director, you do not feel your grievance was adequately resolved the next step is for you to explain the grievance to the HDFS Department Chair.

- If, after all of the above steps are completed, you are not satisfied that your grievance has been adequately addressed, the next step is for you to contact the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs in the College of Human Environmental Sciences to try to resolve your concerns.

Academic Competencies

Grading: Academic performance is evaluated by the faculty and is based upon the student's performance in his/her coursework. It is the responsibility of the faculty to inform students of assignments and corresponding due dates. Penalties for the failure to complete the assignment adequately or on time should be made known to the student at the beginning of the course or project. The faculty should discuss (via syllabus/discussion) with the students the criteria for success or failure.

Students must maintain a 3.0 grade point average ("B" Average) at all times while enrolled as graduate students in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies. Grades below "C" count in computing the GPA but do not carry credit toward a degree. Academic standards are set forth by the UA Graduate School <https://catalog.ua.edu/graduate/about/academic-policies/scholastic-requirements/>.

The faculty considers the student's satisfactory progress toward the completion of his or her degree to be an issue of competence. Students who do not meet the minimum academic requirements will be placed on academic probation and/or dismissed from the program.

Authenticity of Student Work: All students in attendance at The University of Alabama are expected to be honorable and observe standards of conduct appropriate to a community of scholars. The University of Alabama expects from its students a higher standard of conduct than the minimum required to avoid discipline. When enrolled at The University of Alabama, students are expected to abide by the Academic Honor pledge. Additionally, at the discretion of the course instructor, each student will be expected to sign an Honor Pledge.

The Academic Honor Pledge reads as follows: I promise or affirm that I will not at any time be involved with cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, or misrepresentation while enrolled as a student at The University of Alabama. I have read the Academic Honor Code, which explains disciplinary procedures that will result from the aforementioned. I understand that violation of this code will result in penalties as severe as indefinite suspension from the University.

Academic misconduct by students includes all acts of dishonesty in any academic-related matter and any knowing or intentional help or attempt to help, or conspiracy to help, another student commit an act of academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, each of the following acts when performed in any type of academic or academic-related matter, exercise, or activity.

- (1) Cheating: using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, study aids, or computer-related information.

- (2) Plagiarism: representing words, data, pictures, figures, works, ideas, computer programs or outputs or anything generated by someone else, as one's own. Self-Plagiarism: resubmitting your own previously submitted work without proper citation and permission from the current instructor to whom the original work is subsequently submitted.
- (3) Fabrication: presenting as genuine any invented or falsified citation, data or material.
- (4) Misrepresentation: falsifying, altering, or misstating the contents of documents or other materials related to academic matters, including schedules, prerequisites, and transcripts.

Except in divisions that have an alternate academic misconduct policy that has been approved by the Provost, academic misconduct cases shall be resolved by the divisional academic misconduct monitor or the academic dean of the division in which the alleged action took place. Appeals from the monitor's decisions may be made to the academic dean; appeals from the academic dean's decisions may be made to the Office for Academic Affairs.

The Academic Misconduct Disciplinary Policy will be followed in the event of academic misconduct. Students are expected to be familiar with and adhere to the official [Academic Misconduct Policy](#) provided in the Online Catalog.

Clinical Skills Competencies

In a clinical program, academic performance includes more than grades on specific assignments; it also includes the student's performance in meeting clinical obligations. Students are expected to be able to meet clinical competencies throughout the program, including engaging clients in the therapeutic process, assessing existing problems, and designing and implementing intervention strategies for improving outcomes.

The MFT faculty and supervisors evaluates students' clinical competency throughout their time in the program. These judgements are subjective in nature and based on live clinical supervision, observation of video tapes, and case discussion within supervision. Every effort is made to corroborate these judgments among all clinical faculty. To facilitate this, grades for clinical performance (e.g., HD 667 & HD 668) are based upon the discussion among all supervision faculty involved in each grading period. Feedback from that discussion is made available to each student in both written and verbal form at the completion of each semester in which the student is enrolled in either a clinical or supervisory practicum.

Supervisors will also complete quantitative evaluation via the Practicum Evaluation at the end of each semester. One meeting per month is dedicated to the review of students' clinical progress. When an area of concern is identified regarding a student's clinical performance, specific strategies will be implemented in clinical supervision to help the student develop the necessary skills. This is a normal part of the supervision experience. However, if the MFT faculty/clinical supervisor believes that the problem is not alleviated through clinical supervision, the faculty member/clinical supervisor will discuss the concern with the MFT Program Director. The "Minor Deficiency Procedures" will be initiated (see below). If the problem is not alleviated through the improvement process, the problems will be considered a "severe deficiency," and the "severe deficiency" procedure will be enacted.

The MFT Concentration's policy follows the UA graduate school policy regarding the evaluation of student performance in programs including a clinical component.

“In graduate programs that include clinical components, practicum experiences, internships, or other similar program requirements, each student's effectiveness will be given a broad-based evaluation by faculty and supervisors. Final decisions will be based on factors such as course grades, demonstrated clinical competence, personality factors, and relevant test scores. Many programs establish additional academic and/or professional requirements for their students. Failure to meet program requirements for academic progress and/or clinical components may result in the student's being dismissed from the program. Dismissal from a degree program also results in suspension (dismissal) from the Graduate School” (UA Graduate School Handbook).

Professional Competencies

Students are expected to consistently interact in their work with faculty, clinical supervisors, internship placement supervisors, and other students in appropriate ways. Students are expected to adhere to the Capstone Family Therapy Clinic Policies and Procedures and off-site internship policies and procedures (if available). Students are to behave in professional fashion, taking care to discuss cases in confidential and sensitive ways, approaching colleagues with respect, and responding appropriately to feedback given by faculty and internship supervisors. When a student disagrees with the feedback of a faculty or site supervisor, the student is expected to discuss this with that person and not passively dismiss it or discuss it as a problem with other students and faculty. Similarly, students are expected to be sensitive when giving feedback to colleagues, recognizing when their advice may be ill timed or inappropriate to the situation.

Students must take appropriate steps to prevent their own mental health struggles from having a negative effect on their clients or others with whom they work, as judged by faculty or site supervisors. Students are expected to resolve any personal problems that impede their ability to be effective in their clinical work and/or their ability to be appropriate in their interaction with other students, faculty, or other professionals with whom they work.

Where students are unable to resolve their personal problems through their own efforts they may need to seek professional help. Where these issues are evident in the students' conduct/clinical performance, faculty will provide feedback to students and encourage them to address the problematic issues. In cases where students' emotional problems pose a risk to their clients, they may be immediately removed from cases and may be asked to immediately discontinue all clinical work. In cases where students fail to adequately address the problematic issues, the MFT faculty/clinical supervisor will discuss the concern with the MFT Program Director. The “Minor Deficiency Procedures” will be initiated (see below). If the problem is not alleviated through the improvement process, the problems may be considered a “severe deficiency,” and the “Severe Deficiency Procedures” will be enacted (see below).

Ethical and Legal Competencies

Each student and faculty member are required to understand and adhere to the ethical and legal guidelines outlined in Alabama Law and the AAMFT Code of Ethics. Any breach of legal or ethical code of conduct by student may be grounds for remediation or dismissal. As determined by the

faculty, students found to have engaged in or to be engaging in ethical misconduct in their clinical work or in other areas, such as misrepresenting facts in clinical paperwork or in communication with faculty, or engaging in other ethically questionable conduct, may be subject to corrective measures in addition to the “Minor Deficiency Procedures” or “Severe Deficiency Procedures” described below. When deemed appropriate, this may be submitted as a violation of the UA code of academic misconduct.

Non-Discrimination, Diversity, and Inclusion Code of Conduct

Our goal is to foster a spirit of respect and tolerance for others and take corrective action when we feel an individual’s rights or dignity are not being protected (see Student Grievance, Deficiency, and Dismissal Procedures).

Below outlines our expectations for all those who participate in UA MFT program interactions, as well as the handling of unacceptable behavior. “MFT Program interactions” include, but is not limited to, MFT program events, including meetings, courses, conferences, staff meetings, non-MFT program courses, forums, and any other interaction involving students in the MFT program.

Expected Behavior

We expect all parties to abide by this Inclusivity Statement in all venues of UA and the UA MFT program, including ancillary or other events in any official capacity.

- Exercise consideration and respect in your speech and actions.
- Refrain from demeaning, discriminatory, or harassing behavior and speech.
- Be mindful of your surroundings and of your fellow participants.
- Alert UA MFT program faculty if you notice violations of this Inclusivity Statement.

Unacceptable Behavior

- Intimidating, derogatory or demeaning speech, or actions by any member of the UA MFT program, at all program-related events and in all personal and written communications.
- Harmful or prejudicial verbal or written comments or visual images related to gender, age, gender identity, race, health status, national origin, relationship status, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and religion.
- Inappropriate use of nudity and/or sexual images in public spaces (including presentation slides).
- Deliberate stalking or following.
- Harassing photography or recording.
- Sustained disruption of talks or other events.
- Unwelcome and uninvited attention or contact.
- Physical assault (including unwelcome touching or groping).
- Real or implied threat of physical, professional, or financial damage or harm.
- Retaliation for reporting an incident is a violation of the Inclusivity Statement. Reporting an incident in bad faith is a violation of the Inclusivity Statement.

If You Are Subject or Witness to Unacceptable Behavior

If you are feeling uncomfortable or unsafe, witness any inappropriate behavior, or have any other concerns, please contact a UA MFT program faculty member.

If possible, provide the following information in writing on the provided form:

- Identifying information (name/badge number, appearance) of the participant who allegedly violated this policy.
- The behavior that was in violation.
- The approximate time of the behavior.
- The circumstances surrounding the incident.
- Other people involved in or witnessing the incident.

Handling of Unacceptable Behavior

Unacceptable behavior from any member of the UA MFT program will be addressed in a timely manner. Students who participate in unacceptable behavior will be subject to the procedures outlined below in “Remediation and Dismissal Procedures.”

Remediation and Dismissal Procedures

Generally, MFT faculty provide three levels of support for student development. The first level encompasses the typical day-to-day professional interactions and practices that occur during coursework and clinical supervision. The second level comes occurs when a student struggles to make progress on one or more competencies through typical coursework and supervision procedures. Such “minor deficiencies” will be addressed through the collaborative development and implementation of an improvement plan via the “Minor Deficiency Procedures.” The third level typically occurs when a student fails to make progress toward overcoming a “minor deficiency,” but there may be occasions when a “severe deficiency” appears suddenly (e.g., a student commits a significant ethical violation). “Severe deficiencies” are addressed through the collaborative development and implementation of a remediation plan via the “Severe Deficiency Procedures.” Failure to adequately address a “severe deficiency” will result in dismissal from the program.

Minor Deficiency Procedures

The following procedures outline students who do not adhere to the following: 1) Progress on one or more competencies through typical coursework and supervision procedures; 2) Non-discrimination, Diversity, and Inclusion Code of Conduct.

Clinical supervisors will identify the deficiency to be addressed and conduct initial goal setting to improve said deficiency. The following process will be enacted for problems not alleviated through initial goal setting in clinical supervision or if there are differing perspectives between student and supervisor as to the identification and/or severity of the identified issue:

- The student’s clinical supervisor will notify the MFT Program Director/Clinical Director, who will then discuss the deficiencies with the student and develop an improvement plan. The improvement plan will consist of the following:
 - Specific measures to be taken
 - Timeline for completing improvement plan
 - Means for determining whether measures taken have resulted in improvement
 - Consequences if student does not adequately remedy the problem
 - Protection of student rights during the process

- A copy of the improvement plan will be finalized in writing with a copy given to the student, a copy to remain in the student's file, and copies for all members of the MFT faculty.
- If the student fails to meet the outline improvement goals, the MFT faculty may make the determination that the problem is termed a “severe deficiency,” which will then initiate the “Severe Deficiency Procedures.”

Severe Deficiency Procedures

The MFT faculty will make the determination of when a problem (in the area of competency, ethics and/or professionalism) is termed a “severe deficiency.” “Severe Deficiency” is defined as 1) competency problems that are not alleviated through implementation strategies during clinical supervision and the aforementioned “Minor Deficiency Procedures; 2) egregious ethical violations. Problems that are termed “severe deficiency” will enact the following procedures; 3) egregious violation of the Non-Discrimination, Diversity, and Inclusion Code of Conduct:

- The student will meet with the MFT Faculty to discuss grievances and develop a plan for remediation. The plan for remediation will include at least the following components:
 - Specific measures to be taken
 - Timeline for completing remediation plan
 - Means for determining whether measures taken have resulted in remediation
 - Consequences if student does not adequately remedy the problem, which may include dismissal from the Graduate HDFS MFT Concentration, which also results in the dismissal from the Graduate School.
 - Protection of student rights during the process
- A copy of the grievance(s) and remediation plan will be finalized in writing with a copy given to the student, a copy to remain in the student's file, and copies for all members of the MFT faculty.
- The meeting summary will be given to the student, Department Chair, and if appropriate, the College of Human Environmental Sciences Assistant Dean for Student Affairs, and the Dean of the Graduate School.

At the end of the designated time, if the MFT Faculty determines that remediation has occurred, all of the individuals listed above receive notification by letter of that determination.

Dismissal from Program Procedures

If the student still does not resolve the severe deficiencies s/he may be dismissed from the program. Below are the procedures outlining the dismissal process:

- The student will be given the opportunity to prepare and present his/her case to the MFT faculty. The MFT faculty will make a recommendation to the HDFS Department Chair and Graduate Faculty based on input from the student and the MFT faculty.
- If the student remains in good academic standing the HDFS Department Chair and Graduate Faculty may offer the student the option of formally changing into a different HDFS graduate concentration. If the student decides to apply to a

- different Graduate HDFFS Concentration, he/she will follow Departmental procedures for switching concentrations.
- If the recommendation is made to withdraw the student from the HDFFS Marriage and Family Therapy Concentration and the student is not offered to transfer concentration within the department, the committee will prepare a statement reiterating the grievances and forward it to the student, the HDFFS Department Chair, and when appropriate the CHES Assistant Dean for Student Affairs, and the Dean of the Graduate School.
 - If the final decision is to dismiss the student from the graduate school, the MFT faculty will be responsible for facilitating this transition for the student.

The student dismissed from the program will receive a letter from the Program Director notifying him/her of dismissal. Copies of the letter may also be sent to all MFT faculty members, HDFFS Department Chair, and the Dean of the Graduate School. A copy will also be placed in the student's file. Students seeking to appeal the dismissal decision will follow the UA student grievance policy outlined in the Faculty Handbook (<https://catalog.ua.edu/graduate/about/general-information/grievance-procedure-faculty-handbook/>).

Counseling a student out of the program is a difficult situation for both faculty and students. Where possible, faculty will work with those students who exhibit severe deficiencies in an effort to assist them in correcting the problems. Where remedial action on the part of the student is not deemed feasible such as in cases, including, but not limited to, ethical misconduct or emotional instability, the student may be dismissed from the program. In such cases the student will be given specific feedback about the reasons for his/her dismissal. The members of the MFT faculty remain committed to students' growth and are invested in the success of all students in the program. As such we will make every effort to help students address any deficiencies in a way that will allow students to benefit fully from the training and to reach their potential as therapists.