

V. FITNESS TO PRACTICE POLICY AND PROCEDURES

This policy applies to all students enrolled in the Department of Counseling in the College of Education and Human Development.

As part of meeting the program objectives set forth in the Department of Counseling Program Student Handbooks and Graduate Catalog, students are expected to conduct themselves in an ethical, responsible, and professional manner. This conduct is evaluated through the Fitness to Practice (FTP) policy as an element of students' academic performance. The purpose of the FTP review process is to regularly monitor students' professional and personal development (CACREP, 2016) to ensure students demonstrate appropriate progress towards developing the necessary behaviors, attitudes, and professional competencies to practice. Student progress is routinely monitored and discussed during faculty meetings and in consultation with other faculty members.

At the onset of their academic program, students are directed to review these standards and seek clarification when needed.

In order to successfully complete the program and be endorsed for any relevant certifications or licensure, students must demonstrate academic performance meeting or exceeding department standards in all settings, including classes, advising sessions, practicum and internship sites, and all verbal and written communication, including:

1. Master's students - Maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or better and present grades of C in no more than two courses (neither of which may be COU 5393, COU 5683, COU 5713, or COU 5793), that are to be counted toward the degree; Doctoral students - Maintain a GPA of "B" or "pass" or better in all course requirements in the program of study,
2. Demonstrate fitness in their interactions with others as measured on the *Fitness to Practice Standards*, which include the following competencies:
 1. Follows ethical and legal considerations
 2. Displays multicultural competence
 3. Open to new ideas
 4. Aware of own impact on others
 5. Responsive, adaptable, and cooperative
 6. Receptive to and uses feedback
 7. Responds to conflict appropriately
 8. Accepts personal responsibility
 9. Expresses feelings effectively and appropriately
 10. Dependable in meeting obligations, and
3. Conform with the codes of ethics of professional associations in counseling and all related national and state licensure and certification boards.

The FTP Evaluation Process:

Students' competence is evaluated using the *Fitness to Practice Standards* and documented with the *FTP Evaluation Form*. Admission to the programs does not guarantee fitness to remain in the programs. In addition, a FTP review may be initiated on any student at any time if a faculty member, staff, course instructor, program advisor or field supervisor believes the student has displayed behavior which suggests the student does not possess sufficient competency on one or more FTP criteria.

All Master's level students will be reviewed by individual faculty using the *Fitness to Practice Standards* during Introduction to Clinical Mental Health or School Counseling (COU 5203 or COU 5103), Development of Counseling Skills (COU 5393), Practicum (COU 5683) courses, and as necessary throughout the program. All doctoral level students will be evaluated at least twice during their program. For doctoral students, standard evaluations occur in COU 7312 Practicum in Counseling and COU 7413 Internship-I.

Faculty also may initiate a FTP review at any time for:

- a. Students who engage in illegal or unethical behaviors,
- b. Students who present a threat to the wellbeing of others, or
- c. Students who violate the UTSA Student Code of Conduct, the Handbook of Operating Procedures (HOP), any other applicable UTSA policies or procedures, or any other UTSA Department of Counseling policies or procedures.

In such cases, depending upon the circumstances, the fitness to practice process may result in the student being dismissed from the UTSA Department of Counseling without the opportunity for remediation.

Faculty members, staff, course instructors, program advisors, and field supervisors may evaluate all students according to these standards. Students will have the opportunity to participate and respond at each step of the FTP process.

Performance on the FTP standards will be rated on a scale of 0 (competence not achieved) to 1 (competence achieved) as described in the *Fitness to Practice Standards*. A rating of 1 on all FTP standards will indicate competence. The *FTP Evaluation Form* then will be shared with the student and a copy placed in the student's file. A rating of 0 on any of the FTP standards will initiate the following procedure:

(1) The student will be contacted to schedule a meeting to review the *FTP Evaluation Form*. The meeting will be held with the issuing faculty member, unless the FTP process was initiated because the student engaged in illegal or unethical activities, presented a threat to the wellbeing of others or violated the UTSA Student Code of Conduct or the Handbook of Operating Procedures (in which case, the meeting will be held with a faculty review committee, as outlined in Step 3 below).

The student has five business days to respond to the request to schedule a meeting. If the student does *not* respond by the close of business on the fifth business day, the matter will proceed to step 3 below.

(2) At the meeting, the issuing faculty will review the *FTP Evaluation Form* with the student and discuss a remediation plan. Within fifteen business days after the meeting, the issuing faculty will provide a final copy of the remediation plan (incorporating any changes agreed upon at the meeting) to the student for review and signature. The student will have ten business days to review, sign, and return the remediation plan. Failure of the student to sign and/or return the remediation plan by the close of business on the tenth business day will not impede the process and may be considered during the fitness to practice process.

The remediation plan may include

1. Specific competency(ies) from the *Fitness to Practice Standards* which require(s) remediation,
2. Specific recommendations to achieve remediation,
3. Specific requirements to demonstrate remediation efforts have been successful, and
4. A specific deadline for subsequent monitoring to evaluate progress.

Both the student and issuing faculty may retain copies of the signed *FTP Evaluation Form* and remediation plan and copies will be placed in the student's folder. At any time during the remediation process, the issuing faculty member may refer the student to a faculty review committee.

(3) A faculty review committee will be convened if:

- a. The FTP process was initiated because the student engaged in illegal or unethical activities, presented a threat to the wellbeing of others, or violated the UTSA Student Code of Conduct or the Handbook of Operating Procedures,
- b. A student fails to respond to the issuing faculty's request to schedule a meeting to review the *FTP Evaluation Form*,
- c. A student fails to show reasonable progress in the remediation plan, or
- d. A student receives more than one *FTP Evaluation Form* rated 0 during his or her Program of Study.

The committee will be comprised of three core faculty appointed by the Department Chair. The student will be required to meet with the faculty review committee in accordance with the procedures described in #1 and #2 above. The faculty review committee may consult with any of the full Department of Counseling faculty regarding the development of alternative remedial strategies and/or evaluation of the student's fitness for continuation in the Department of Counseling.

The faculty review committee will monitor the student's progress on the remediation plan. If at any time the student is determined not to be making satisfactory progress, the faculty review committee may either modify the remediation plan or dismiss the student from the program.

(4) All faculty review committee decisions for a student's dismissal from the Department of Counseling will be forwarded to the Department Chair. The Department Chair will forward the

committee's decision to the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies the College of Education and Human Development. The student may appeal the committee's decision to the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies. Decisions by the Associate Dean are final.