University of Southern Mississippi  
Master of Science Degree in Marriage and Family Therapy  
Retention, Remediation, and Dismissal Policy

It is our desire that all students are successful in the USM MFT program, and faculty are committed to helping all students succeed. To this end, all faculty, including course instructors, supervisors, the clinic director, and the program director, have an open door policy to students. We hope and expect that students will bring their academic, program, or personal concerns to us as soon as they become problematic so that we can work together to put into place the support students may need to be successful.

Each student is unique and, therefore, the support he or she may need will be unique to him or her. However, we also want to make sure that our students are informed of all the resources available to them. Below are links to several sites that provide student support services at USM:

Graduate Bulletin (listing of several student support services including Student Counseling Services, Student Health Services, and Office of Disability Accommodations, among others): http://catalog.usm.edu/content.php?catoid=16&navoid=918

Writing Center: https://www.usm.edu/writing-center

Speaking Center: https://www.usm.edu/speaking-center

Program Probation

Occasionally, students experience difficulty in their graduate program that may lead to them being placed on probation or other corrective actions. A student may be placed on program probation for unsatisfactory academic progress or for unsatisfactory performance in other training domains, including, but not limited to, graduate assistantship duties, research-related duties, clinical practice requirements, internship placements, professional or ethical violations or concerns and/or other reasons identified by faculty.

When a clinical student is placed on program probation, the basis for the probation, the term of the probationary period, and the conditions which must be met in order to be removed from probationary status will be specified in writing. Failure to meet the conditions of probation will result in termination from the program. If a student believes that the probationary status is not justified, or that the conditions of the probation are unreasonable, the student may appeal in writing to the Department Chair within 10 working days. A student placed on probation will, in consultation with the MFT faculty, develop a remediation plan. Remediation plans are structured to assist students in overcoming whatever difficulties they are experiencing so they can achieve their professional goals. Students placed on probation will remain on probation for a minimum of one semester. Students placed on probation for unacceptable grades must successfully remediate the unacceptable grade and meet the requirements of their remediation plan, without incurring any additional complaints or problems, in order for probationary status to be removed.
Students placed on probation for unsatisfactory performance in other domains will also be placed on probation for a minimum of one semester. Removal from probation requires satisfactory progress of the remediation plan as determined by faculty consensus. Unsatisfactory progress will result in dismissal from the program. A student who has formerly been on probationary status may be terminated from the program for future inappropriate conduct or subsequent academic difficulties (a grade of C or lower).

Remediation

When a student experiences difficulties in their program of study or is placed on probation, several steps may be taken as a part of their remediation plan. These include, but are not limited to: (a) reducing the student’s course load, (b) referring students for academic assistance on campus, (c) approving a request for a leave-of-absence, (d) referring a student for therapy services or medical intervention, (e) creating a behavioral contract to outline the necessary changes and steps that must be taken for successful completion of the program, (f) requiring additional semesters of practicum or other clinical experience beyond the minimum normally required by the program, (g) removing the students graduate assistantship or work study assignment, and (h) providing additional faculty mentoring and encouragement.

All recommendations are an effort to help students succeed. However, our primary concern must first be the welfare of the clients seeking assistance. If, during a student’s program, the clinical faculty assess that a student does not have the personal and professional maturity needed to be an effective marriage and family therapy practitioner, the student will be advised of this and counseled to seek another area of study.

Dismissal

A student’s termination from the program may be a student decision or faculty decision. If there is a disagreement among the MFT faculty regarding the disposition of a student’s status in the program, the MFT Program Director and the Department Chair shall make the final decision. The attrition rate in our program is relatively low. When a student does leave, it is usually for a personal (e.g., incompatible program fit) rather than an academic reason. There have been instances in the past, however, when students have been counseled out of the program; and there have been instances when students were terminated for academic reasons. Failure to meet Program, Departmental, or Graduate Studies requirements is grounds for termination.

Because Mississippi Law prohibits anyone with a felony conviction from becoming licensed as a marriage and family therapist, any student convicted of a felony will be counseled out of the program. Likewise, any student who has been convicted of a felony prior to admission is required to immediately inform the MFT Program Director of this prior conviction in order to determine the best course of action for the student. If formal charges are filed or if other legal arraignment occurs while degree work is in progress, the student therapist will be expected to resign from the Program until charges are dropped, innocence is proven through legal means, or said charges are expunged. Students with a history of legal difficulties, or with legal charges or issues pending at the time of enrollment, are expected to make full disclosure of said charges.
during the enrollment and interview process. Such disclosure and discussion will be addressed to the Program Director. Failure to disclose information will result in dismissal from the program.

The following are some additional reasons for dismissal of a student with regular status from a graduate program:

- The student did not return to good academic standing following probationary semester(s).
  - A GPA of 3.0 was not achieved.
  - The student did not earn the required improved grade on a retaken course.
  - The student failed to meet other remediation criteria.

- The student earned grades that made it impossible to return to good academic standing, thus rendering graduation impossible.
  - The student earned a grade of C- or below that could not be retaken because the one allowable retake was used to replace a prior low grade.
  - The student earned the 7th hour of C+ or below that could not be retaken because the one allowable retake was used to replace a prior low grade.

- The student exceeded the time limit for the degree program without completing the degree.

- The student was proven to have committed academic/research misconduct or other ethical violation.

- The student failed to demonstrate professional competency and/or exhibited conduct inappropriate to the profession.

- The student failed a qualifying exam, comprehensive exam, or defense twice.