

# Mental Health Counseling

## Program Description

### Introduction

The Master of Art (M.A.) program in Mental Health Counseling is a 60-credit course of study in which students are required to take a fixed sequence of courses in counseling theory and practice, group dynamics, psychopathology, appraisal and assessment, foundations of mental health counseling, social and cultural foundations, career counseling, family counseling and clinical instruction. Students are also required to participate in a two-hour child abuse workshop. These are complemented by courses in human growth and development, research and evaluation, personality psychology, children & adolescent counseling, grief counseling, clinical supervision, and professional and ethical issues. Students must successfully complete a one-year; 9-credit supervised internship and pass a comprehensive examination in order to be awarded the M.A. degree. The comprehensive examination will assess students' abilities to integrate and synthesize theoretical and practical knowledge into an effective, professional method of and approach to counseling.

The Program is designed to fulfill the goals of: providing students with a thorough grounding in advanced principles of mental health counseling at a graduate level, and providing students with an understanding of the tools of counseling that is suitable for building careers in private and public mental health agencies.

The objectives of the program include: providing students with advanced research-based knowledge in the area of group and individual counseling, counseling techniques, and testing and diagnosis; providing students with a full understanding of the professional and ethical issues relevant to mental health counseling and consultation; and provide students with detailed knowledge of multicultural and career issues in counseling.

**This Student Handbook serves as the primary source of information, guidelines and requirements for students in the MHC program. Rules and guidelines in this Handbook supersede those in the general Medaille College Student Handbook. Students are encouraged to keep a hard copy of this handbook as a reference. Students are required to follow the handbook in which they were admitted under. That is, students who are admitted in the Fall of 2009, would follow the 2009-2010 handbook and so forth.**

### Program Delivery Format

Medaille's MHC program is offered as a fixed sequence of 17 8-week courses, taken one course at a time, plus three semesters of Supervised Internship (MHC 677). Each 8-week course will include 38 in-class hours (split between the fourth and eighth weekends of the course) and appropriate amounts of professor guided independent study. Students will proceed thorough the Program as a cohort. This delivery method requires students to take two classes per semester, and six classes per calendar year. During the students second year the student will register for an additional 3 credit hours per semester for Internship (MHC 677). Therefore, students will be registered for 9 credit hours per semester during their second year.

## **Admissions Requirements**

Please contact SAGE Admissions for specific information on admissions requirements.

### **Provisional Admission**

Students may be admitted provisionally to the MHC program pending receipt of credentials such as original transcripts or scores. Students admitted as provisional students may take no more than 12 semester hours of credit (four courses) prior to formal admission.

### **Probationary Admission**

Students who fail to satisfactorily meet the criteria for full admission into the MHC program *may* be admitted with probationary status. Students admitted with this status need to meet with the Program Director and the Dean for the School of Adult and Graduate Education prior to the start of classes to discuss the terms of the probation, and to sign probationary contracts. Students admitted on probationary status, who are unable to fulfill the terms of the probationary contracts may be dismissed from the program.

### **Registering for Courses**

Students in the MHC Program are “block registered” for each class by the Registrar’s Office. If the student has a hold on their account (for financial, business or health office reasons), the Registrar will not be able to register the student for the term. It is the student’s responsibility to work with the appropriate office to remove the hold, and then contact the Registrar’s Office at 716.932.2582 to ensure they are registered for classes.

### **Transfer of Coursework Taken at Other Institutions or as an Advanced Special Student**

Transfer courses must carry the same/or a similar title and have covered the same/similar objectives and goals as the course the student wishes to waive at Medaille College. Students must be aware that since this is a New York State licensure qualifying program, very strict criteria is followed when transferring in courses. A maximum of six (6) credit hours of graduate level coursework earned from regionally accredited institutions prior to or after matriculation to Medaille’s School of Adult and Graduate Education may be applied towards a master’s degree in Mental Health Counseling. All transfer credits must meet the following criteria:

- Courses must have been offered at the graduate level.
- Courses may not have been used to meet degree requirements for previously earned graduate degrees.
- Courses must have been completed within the last five years of matriculation in the Department.
- Courses must receive approval from the Registrar, the Program Director and the Dean of the School of Adult and Graduate Education.
- A grade of "B" or above must have been earned in the requested transfer courses.

\* The student may be subject to final examination in all coursework transferred into the Master's degree in Mental Health Counseling.

\*\* No credit is granted for correspondence courses or for "credit-by-examination" courses.

\*\*\*A copy of the transfer course syllabus and textbook table of contents may be required for both New York State and the Program.

### **Clinical Placement**

Students are required to complete 100 Pre-Practicum hours (45 of which must be direct contact hours) after completing MHC 670, Clinical Instruction. Subsequent to that experience students are required to complete a minimum of 600 hours of Clinical Internship (240 of which must be direct contact hours) while completing 9 credit hours of MHC 677, Supervised Clinical Internship.

Pre-Practicum and Internship placements will be chosen as a collaborated effort between students and the Clinical Coordinator of the program. Each placement is considered on an individual basis and must first meet the approval of the Clinical Coordinator.

Students are expected to complete their Pre Practicum (100) hours and are strongly encouraged to start their Internship during the first term of MHC677. Students are expected to complete at least half of their remaining (600) Internship hours in each of the remaining term of MHC677. If a student does not meet the required hours in any term of MHC677, she/he will receive a CP grade for that term. If the student does not complete the full requirements of Pre Practicum and Internship by the end of the third term of MHC677, she/he must register for a fourth term of MHC677 in order to complete the requirements. Students who do not complete their Pre Practicum and Internship requirements by the end of the fourth term of MHC677 may be terminated from the program and will not be recommended for graduation.

Guidelines for the Clinical Placement can be found in the Clinical Placement Manual at [http://www.medaille.edu/academics/graduate/mhc/clinical\\_placement\\_manual.pdf](http://www.medaille.edu/academics/graduate/mhc/clinical_placement_manual.pdf)

### **Attendance**

Attendance is a **critical** and mandatory part of your education and clinical training. In the event of a serious illness or family emergency that will result in an absence, students **must immediately contact their instructor and the Program Director** to notify them of their absence. Students who miss more than 3 instructional hours may be at risk of receiving a lower grade; an incomplete (in rare circumstances) and/or needing to make up the "seat time" the next time the course is offered; or failing the course. Students who miss a significant amount of class time and fail to contact their instructor in a timely manner or who do not have an excused absence will be given an F for the course. Financial Aid does not cover classes that a student has to retake.

### **Email Policy Within the Program**

All students are given a Medaille College email address when registered at Medaille College. It is the students responsibility to check this account several times a week. Important program and College information will be emailed to you there (NOT to your personal email account). If you

need assistance setting up your Medaille email account, please email [helpdesk@medaille.edu](mailto:helpdesk@medaille.edu) or call the IT Department on Campus.

When using BbVista, students should note that the email in the online course is section specific. It is a different account than your Medaille College email account (even though the user name is the same). This allows students to track all of their course email correspondence within a specific course.

### **Academic Review/Probation/Dismissal**

Any graduate student who receives a grade of F in any course required for completion of the MHC degree or who indicates a lack of ability as determined by the program faculty, will receive an immediate academic review by the MHC program faculty. Upon completion of the academic review, the MHC program faculty may place the student on academic probation. Such notice will be made in writing by the Program Director prior to the end of the drop/add period of the next semester and will indicate the terms of the probation and its removal. Any student placed on academic probation is limited to three (3) credits per semester while on probation and is required to sign and adhere to a prescribed probationary contract. Any graduate student not meeting the written terms of their academic probation may be academically dismissed from the College.

Students will not be allowed to begin or continue internship placements if they are placed on academic probation. Further, students placed on probation or suspension for violations of the MHC Student Handbook or the Medaille College Student Handbook will not be allowed to begin or continue internship placements and depending on the severity of the offense, a student may be dismissed from the College.

### **Concerns or Questions about a Course or a Grade**

In the event that a student has a concern or question about a course or a grade, the instructor of the course should be consulted before bringing concerns to the Program Director. If the situation is not resolved in consultation with the instructor, concerns and/or questions should be brought in writing to the attention of Program Director. The Program Director will respond to the student within 21 days of receipt of the concern. If the student is dissatisfied with the Program Director's decision, he/she may petition the decision, in writing, to the Dean of the School of Adult and Graduate Education. The Dean's decision is final.

### **Grade Point Average Requirements**

The School of Adult and Graduate Education at Medaille College requires that all graduate students maintain a grade point average of 3.0 or above. A student whose grade point average falls below 3.0 after completion of 9 credits will be placed on academic probation for the following semester. A student whose grade point average falls below 3.0 for a second and successive semester may be allowed (with the recommendation of the program faculty and the consent of the Dean) a third semester in which to raise his or her grade point average to 3.0 or above. A student whose grade point average falls below 3.0 after three successive semesters will be required to withdraw from the College. A student whose cumulative grade point average falls below 3.0 will not be recommended for graduation.

Likewise, any graduate student who receives a grade of F in any course required for completion of the MHC degree or who indicates a lack of ability as determined by the program faculty, will receive an immediate academic review by the graduate program faculty. Upon completion of the academic review, the graduate program faculty may place the student on academic probation. Such notice will be made in writing by the Program Director or designee prior to the end of the drop/add period of the next semester and will indicate the terms of the probation and its removal. Any student placed on academic probation is limited to three (3) credits per semester while on probation and is required to sign and adhere to a prescribed probationary contract. Any graduate student not meeting the written terms of their academic probation may be academically dismissed from the College.

A student earning a C- or lower (i.e., an F) in any course is required to repeat the course; a student may carry a maximum of two C grades on their transcript during the program EXCEPT in the following core courses, where a B- or better MUST be achieved: MHC 670, MHC 605, MHC 650 and MHC 620. A student may repeat any course in an effort to earn a higher grade, however both grades will remain on the student's official transcript and the latter grade will be used in computing the grade point average.

### **Repeating a Failing Course**

Graduate students must repeat a course in which they received a failing grade. The student may retake the course the next time it is offered in the MHC program as long as it does **not** conflict with the student's current cohort schedule. Once the student has retaken the failed course, the student **must** return to the cohort in which they were admitted to. If the course the student is repeating conflicts with the student's schedule, the student may be required to extend their anticipated graduation date and repeat the failing course the following semester in which the course is offered. Any time a student is required to repeat a course they **must** receive permission from both the Program Director and the course instructor. If a student fails MHC 605, MHC 620, MHC 650 or MHC 670, they **may not begin MHC 677 Internship**. Students who fail these core clinical cores will be required to meet with the Program Director and/or the Internship Coordinator to develop a remediation plan. Once the student successfully completes the remediation plan, retakes and receives a passing grade in the failed clinical course and has met with both the Program Director and the Internship Coordinator the student will be allowed to begin MHC 677 Internship. If the student fails the clinical course the second time or fails to fulfill the requirements of the remediation plan, the student may be automatically dismissed from the program. It should be noted that delaying MHC 677 may also delay a student's graduation date.

### **Incompletes**

A student may request an Incomplete for a course if (i) they have a passing grade in the course and (ii) uncontrollable circumstances (i.e., major illness, childbirth, death in the family) prevent them from completing the coursework. The decision to grant an Incomplete is up to the Instructor. Students have one year from the date the Incomplete is issued to make up the work, after this period, the I grade will revert to an F and the student will need to retake the course.

### **Academic Integrity**

Medaille's faculty and administration expect all students to complete their academic assignments with honesty and integrity. Students who engage in any form of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on a test, forging a signature or an entire college document) will be dealt with severely, with penalties ranging from an F on a given assignment to failing a course or even academic suspension or dismissal from the program. **It is important to note that the School of Adult and Graduate Education at Medaille College interprets the submission of the same paper, or substantially the same paper, to more than one instructor to be a violation of this code. Students found guilty of such offenses risk expulsion from the College.**

### **Professionalism**

The Mental Health Counseling program expects students to maintain their integrity and professionalism as both students and prospective counselors. Students are required to abide by the Student Professionalism Agreement, which they sign at the beginning of the Program.

Students are expected to be psychologically sound, interpersonally effective, and able to engage with peers, faculty, colleagues, consumers, and professionals in a healthy and responsible manner. Students are expected to give and receive feedback as a part of their training and growth.

Students are not only expected to achieve academically at the graduate level, but also to manage themselves throughout the program as ethical professionals-in-training. Issues of Ethical Misconduct, Behavioral Misconduct, Impairment, and Incompetence will be dealt with swiftly and fairly as they might arise.

### **Behavioral Decorum**

Because the MHC program runs as a cohorted program, and because students are professionals-in-training, the standards of classroom and Internship behavior are especially high. To support a respectful, meaningful and appropriate learning environment, students are expected to:

- arrive on time and be prepared to participate in class discussions
- conduct themselves in a polite, mature and professional manner during all interactions with students and faculty
- maintain a respectful silence when a faculty member or fellow student is talking, and be respectful of other's opinions
- refrain from acting in a disruptive, disrespectful, intimidating or rude manner
- refrain from working on assignments, surfing the web, answering texts or phone calls during class

Issues with students who are unable to demonstrate appropriate behavioral decorum will be brought to the attention of the Program Director and the Dean of the School of Adult and Graduate Education. A first offense normally results in a formal warning, but may also result in the student being placed on Behavioral Probation. Terms of the Probation will vary depending on

the specific issue at hand. Consequences of a second offense will be outlined in the formal warning, and in the Probation contract (if one is issued). The College takes the sanctity of the learning environment and the safety and comfort of its students very seriously. Students who are unable to conduct themselves in an appropriate manner (as defined by this Handbook, by Student Professionalism Agreement and by the ACA), will be dealt with and, if necessary, dismissed from the program. See below for additional details.

### **Program Dismissal**

- Students may be dismissed from the program for academic reasons (for example, three semesters of a GPA below a 3.0; plagiarism; verbal, non-verbal, or written communication problems).
- Students may be dismissed for overt violations of the current ACA Ethical Codes and Standards of Practice (as per signed Professionalism Agreement).
- Students may be dismissed for “personal unsuitability for the profession.” Examples of such behavior could include:
  - a. consistent inability to assess/identify problem situations in a mental health or educational settings and inability to negotiate/compromise in difficult or conflicting situations;
  - b. consistent inability to recognize personal boundary/power issues which inhibit or prevent the student from learning appropriate professional behavior/counseling skills;
  - c. consistent inability to work as a team member, in a group setting;
  - d. consistent inability or refusal to participate in learning activities designed to promote and improve the student’s self-understanding, self-analysis skills and interpersonal skills;
  - e. consistent inability to receive constructive feedback about one's progress, skills, abilities, effectiveness and professional behavior;
  - f. consistent inability to respect or tolerate differences in perspectives, opinion, thought process, belief systems, value systems or ideologies;
  - g. consistent inability to understand the negative impact that one's behavior has on others.

The term "consistent" refers to at least two instances of witnessed behavior. Professional behavior is expected at all times and in all settings and activities related Medaille College and to the field of Counseling These settings include the classroom, other on campus meetings, off campus (out of classroom projects, on/off-campus professional activities or gatherings, internship settings, and other school-related events).

### **Rescheduling Classes in the Event of Inclement Weather**

In the event that the College cancels one day out of the weekend schedule due to inclement

weather or other unforeseen circumstances, the Instructor will contact the cohort to inform them of how missed work/time will be made up. If, however, two or more days out of the weekend schedule are cancelled by the College, the Instructor and cohort should anticipate that cancelled class days will automatically be rescheduled for the following weekend.

Students may sign up for weather closure notices at [www.medaille.edu/alert/](http://www.medaille.edu/alert/)

### **Emergency Facilities Closure**

In the case of an emergency facilities closure (i.e., due to natural disaster or pandemic flu), classes will continue online using BbVista. The link for BbVista courses can be found at [www.medaille.edu](http://www.medaille.edu) and information regarding this can be found on your class syllabus.

### **Written Comprehensive Examination**

#### **Purpose**

The comprehensive examination consists of five case simulations in which students must correctly diagnosis clients, use proper treatment plans for diagnosis, and provide any adjunct services that would be beneficial for the clients. The comprehensive examination is not intended to test the recall of detailed facts, rather it is the test of the student comfort level in the requirements that are expected of beginning counselors in the field. In each case scenario, students will be given a series of answers. Some of these answers are correct (or the best fit) and others are incorrect given the case scenario. In other words, students (beginning counselors) will not have to independently come up with answers rather they will be guided with answers that are good choices, inappropriate choices or best choices.

The comprehensive examination is based the clinical decision making model which expects counselors to gather information presented, including making a multi-axial diagnosis, and demonstrate an appropriate treatment plan including goals, technique and appropriate adjunct services.

\*\*\*The comprehensive exam will be administered during the last day of Clinical Supervision class.

Extenuating circumstances, such as personal health or residency at great distance from Medaille College, may warrant special arrangements by the advisor and be subsequently approved by the Dean for the School of Adult and Graduate Education. Exams are updated on a yearly basis in order to keep the content of the exam current.

To prepare for the examination, the student is encouraged to review the material from their coursework (Counseling Theory, Psychopathologies, Ethics, Group Dynamics, Clinical Instruction, Personality Theory, Human Growth and Development, Family Therapy and Research Methods) beginning at least one semester prior to the semester in which the exam will be given. It is also recommended that the student be familiar with material that has been covered

in classes, current research in books and journals in the field, and participate in study groups that may be organized by fellow students prior to the exam.

### **Evaluation of Master's Comprehensive Exams**

Students are required to receive a score of 70% or higher to pass part one of the exam. a). The student's response to the examination is reviewed by two faculty members from the team who prepared the question(s). Performance is graded as " Pass", " revisions needed", or "Fail".

b). When the student's performance is graded "Fail" by both readers, then one additional faculty member from the team who prepared the question(s) for the core area being examined will independently read and score the student's response.

c). A student who receives a grade of "Fail" from all three readers on one or both parts of the exam receives a failing grade. Likewise, a student who receives a grade of " Pass" from two readers receives a grade of " Pass" on the comprehensive examination

### **Student Feedback**

After all examination results have been summarized, the Program Director conveys the results to each student by e-mail. Students usually receive the e-mail about one to two weeks after the examination date. Should students fail either component of the examination, they **MUST** confer with the program director about options available to them.

**\*\* Failure of the Master's Comprehensive Examination:** Students who fail may retake the exam within 6 months of failing the exam.

### **Program Time Limits**

All requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Mental Health Counseling must be completed within five years of the date of admission to the program. All graduate students must be registered for a minimum of six credit hours during each fall, spring and summer semester. Graduate students in good academic standing who cannot maintain continuous registration should apply for a leave of absence by the beginning of the semester in which the leave is to begin.

### **Waiver of a Course Requirement**

In certain circumstances, a waiver of a course requirement may be requested based on coursework taken at Medaille College or at another institution. To petition for a course waiver, the student must submit a formal written letter requesting a Waiver of a Course Requirement. This letter must be approved by the Registrar, the Program Director and the Dean of the School of Adult and Graduate Education.

### **Commonly Asked Questions**

#### **What is a Mental Health Counselor?**

The American Mental Health Counselors Association (AMHCA) defines mental health counseling as *the provision of professional counseling services involving the application of principles of psychotherapy, human development, learning theory, group dynamics, and the etiology of mental illnesses and dysfunctional behavior to individuals, couples, families, and groups for the purposes of treating psychopathology and promoting optimal mental health.* Mental Health Counseling is a distinct profession with national standards for education and clinical practice. The American Mental Health Counselors Association (AMHCA) is the primary

organization representing Mental Health Counselors. A licensed Mental Health Counselor has met or exceeded the following professional standards: an earned master's degree in Mental Health Counseling or the equivalent (as approved by NYS); completion of a minimum of 3000 hours of clinical work at an NYS approved site or with a temporary permit issued by NYS ; and a passing score on the NYS required licensure exam.

### **What is the difference between a Mental Health Counselor and a Social Worker or Psychologist?**

Mental Health Counselors- along with Psychologists, Psychiatrists, Social Workers, and Psychiatric Nurses- are one of the five CORE mental health providers recognized by the National Institute of Health (NIH). In general, psychologists are all doctoral level practitioners with a Ph.D./Psy.D. in Clinical or Counseling Psychology. Psychologists receive extensive training in assessment and testing. Social Workers, at the master's level, receive broad training in a variety of social services roles, including counseling, but also case management, social welfare and others. Mental Health Counselors, like Social Workers are primarily a master's level profession and are trained in a variety of social service roles including counseling, case management and social welfare.

Psychologists and Social Workers, and Mental Health Counselors are primarily trained to practice counseling and psychotherapy. Naturally, all three of these mental health professions provide many of the same services, often resulting in public confusion regarding respective roles. Because professional Counselors and Social Workers are licensed in almost every state, this blurring of professional identities is likely to continue. Counselors and Social Workers may also earn doctoral degrees, though most professionals in these two professions have master's degrees.

### **In what settings do Mental Health Counselors work?**

Mental Health Counselors work in many settings including:

- \* Mental Health Clinics
- \* Drug and alcohol programs
- \* Hospitals
- \* Psychiatric centers
- \* College and University counseling centers
- \* Pastoral counseling centers
- \* Crisis services
- \* Hospice and Palliative care services
- \* Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)
- \* Private Practice

## **Mental Health Counseling Professional Associations**

### **American Counseling Association (ACA)**

The American Counseling Association is the flagship organization and the largest counseling organization in the world with some 45,000 members and 18 divisional affiliate organizations. ACA has written a comprehensive Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice that all professional counselors are expected to read and understand. There are currently 19 Divisions comprising ACA. ACA was founded in 1952. You can find more information on ACA at [www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org).

**American Mental Health Counselors Association (AMHCA)**

The American Mental Health Counselors Association was founded in 1978 and is the ACA Division representing the profession of Mental Health Counselors. The AMHCA also has a separate Code of Ethics from ACA, though the two Codes are consistent on major issues. You may find more information about AHMCA at [www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org).

**The National Board for Certified Counselors, Inc. (NBCC)**

The National Board for Certified Counselors is the national credentialing board for professional counselors. Mental Health Counselors seeking national certification may take the National Counselor Examination (NCE) in order to become a Certified Clinical Mental Health Counselor (CCMHC). While national certification differs from state licensure, New York State uses the NCMHCE as their counselor licensure examination. (Counselor licensure is explained below) NBCC's web site is [www.nbcc.org](http://www.nbcc.org).

**Web sites for additional information on Mental Health Counselors:**

American Counseling Association (ACA) [www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org)

American Mental Health Counselors Association (AMHCA) [www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org)

National Board for Certified Counselors, Inc. NBCC) [www.nbcc.org](http://www.nbcc.org)

New York Counseling Association (NCA) [www.nyca.org](http://www.nyca.org)

New York Mental Health Counselors Association (NYMHCA) [www.nymhca.org](http://www.nymhca.org)

This handbook has been prepared as part of and in conjunction with the Medaille College Policy Manuals, Volumes 1 through IX; detailed or background information on some of the policies and procedures covered in this manual may be found by referencing other volumes. Medaille College has made every effort to provide in this publication accurate, up-to-date information regarding the programs, policies, personnel, and activities of the College. However, changes are likely to take place during the life of this Handbook which cannot be foreseen. Students will be notified of these changes in writing. The College cannot be held responsible for information which becomes outdated or is printed in error.

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