

Case Study: A Comparison of *Clinical* Mental Health Degree Programs:

CLINICAL MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELING, MARRIAGE & FAMILY THERAPY, SOCIAL WORK, AND PSYCHOLOGY



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The research comparing the curricula for four mental health professions on the following pages complements the article "Let's Be Fair! Comparing Social Work and Counseling Degrees," that appears on page 9 in the 2021 Spring Issue of AMHCA's quarterly magazine, *The Advocate Magazine*.

AMHCA members can download the issue free at connections.amhca.org/publications/advocatemag.

To compare clinical mental health degree programs, Dr. Aaron Norton compared the curricula of the four main mental health professions that do clinical work—counseling, psychology, marriage and family therapy, and psychology.

Using the University of South Florida as a case example, Dr. Norton looked at three aspects of preparation for graduate mental health professional degrees in those four main mental health professions that do clinical work.

Dr. Norton's findings appear on the following five pages, presented in three tables:

- **Table 1** compares the content requirements set by the accreditation and standards bodies for each of the four professions.
- **Table 2** lists the required coursework for graduate mental health professional degrees in each of the four professions.
- See also the Key following Table 2.
- **Table 3** compares the required coursework domains for graduate mental health professional degrees in each of the four professions.

His analysis concludes that:

- The **Clinical Mental Health Counseling** program requires more coursework on counseling and psychotherapy and career assessment and counseling than the other programs.
- The **Marriage and Family Therapy** program requires more coursework on marriage and family therapy than the other programs.
- The **Social Work** program requires more coursework on policy development and analysis, and social and cultural issues, than the other programs.
- The **Clinical Psychology** program requires more coursework in cognitive and physiological psychology and research than the other programs.

"After reviewing a side-by-side comparison of the graduate level training of the four mental health professions," Dr. Norton said, "I must say that clinical mental health counseling pretty clearly provides the most relevant and robust coursework in terms of clinical utility."

Case Example: Comparison of Curriculum for Licensed Mental Health Professions at University of South Florida

TABLE 1. COMPARISON OF CONTENT REQUIREMENTS: CACREP, COAMFTE, CSWE, AND APA				
	Clinical Mental Health Counselor	Marriage and Family Therapist	Social Worker	Clinical Psychologist
Content Domains	<u>Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) 2016 Standards</u>	<u>Council on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE) 2018 Standards</u>	<u>Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) 2015 Standards</u>	<u>American Psychological Association (APA) 2015 Standards</u>
Assessment, Diagnosis, Evaluation, and Testing	1e. Psychological tests and assessments specific to clinical mental health counseling 3a. Intake interview, mental status evaluation, biopsychosocial history, mental health history, and psychological assessment for treatment planning and caseload management	FCA7: Systemic/Relational Assessment & Mental Health Diagnosis and Treatment	Competency 7: Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities; Competency 9: Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities	Assessment
Counseling, Psychotherapy, Treatment, and Intervention	1b. Theories and Models Related to Clinical Mental Health Counseling 1c. Principles, Models, and Documentation Formats of Biopsychosocial Case Conceptualization and Treatment Planning 2c. Mental Health service delivery modalities within the continuum of care, such as inpatient, outpatient, partial treatment and aftercare, and the mental health counseling services networks 2h. Classifications, indications, and contraindications of commonly prescribed psychopharmacological medications for appropriate medical referral and consultation 2m. Record keeping, third party reimbursement, and other practice and management issues in clinical mental health counseling 3b. Techniques and interventions for prevention and treatment of a broad range of mental health issues	FCA2: Clinical Treatment with Individuals, Couples and Families	Competency 8: Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities	Communication and Interpersonal Skills; Intervention
Ethical and Legal Issues	2l. Legal and ethical considerations specific to clinical mental health counseling 3c. Strategies for interfacing with the legal system regarding court-referred clients	FCA 5: Professional Identity, Law, Ethics & Social Responsibility	Competency 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior	Ethical and Legal Issues

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Foundations/ Introduction to Profession	1a. History and Development of Clinical Mental Health Counseling 2a. Roles and Settings of Clinical Mental Health Counselors 2k. Professional organizations, preparation standards, and credentials relevant to the practice of clinical mental health counseling 3d. Strategies for interfacing with integrated behavioral health care professionals	FCA1: Foundations of Relational/Systemic Practice, Theories & Models; FCA9: Community Intersections & Collaboration	Competency 6: Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities	Professional Values, Attitudes, and Behaviors; Consultation and Interprofessional/ Interdisciplinary Skills
	Human Growth and Development	2g. Impact of biological and neurological mechanisms on mental health	FCA 6: Biopsychosocial Health & Development Across the Life Span	
	Policy Development and Analysis	2i. Legislation and government policy relevant to clinical mental health counseling		Competency 5: Engage in Policy Practice
Psychopathology	2b. Etiology, nomenclature, treatment, referral, and prevention of mental and emotional disorders 2d. Diagnostic process, including differential diagnosis and the use of current diagnostic classification systems, including the <i>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)</i> and the <i>International Classification of Diseases (ICD)</i> 2f. Impact of crisis and trauma on individuals with mental health diagnoses			
	Research		FCA 4: Research & Evaluation	Competency 4: Engage In Practice-informed Research and Research-informed Practice Research
Social and Cultural Issues	2j. Cultural factors relevant to clinical mental health counseling; 3e. Strategies to advocate for persons with mental health issues	FCA 3: Diverse, Multicultural and/or Underserved Communities; FCA 8: Contemporary Issues	Competency 2: Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice; Competency 3: Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice	Individual and Cultural Diversity
	Substance Abuse	1d. Neurobiological and Medical Foundation and Etiology of Addiction and Co-Occurring Disorders 2e. Potential for substance use disorders to mimic and/or co-occur with a variety of neurological, medical, and psychological disorders		

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TABLE 2. LIST OF REQUIRED COURSEWORK FOR GRADUATE MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL DEGREE AT UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA				
Degree Program	Clinical Mental Health Counselor	Marriage and Family Therapist	Social Worker	Clinical Psychologist
	<u>Master of Arts (MA) in Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling</u>	<u>Master of Science (MS) in Marriage and Family Therapy</u>	<u>Master of Social Work (MSW)</u>	<u>Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Psychology, Concentration in Clinical Psychology</u>
Credit Hours	60	60	60 (non-BSW); 35 (has BSW)	80
Accreditation	Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP)	Council on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE) (pending)	Council of Social Work Education (CSWE)	American Psychological Association (APA)
Coursework	Foundations of Mental Health Counseling	Foundations of Mental Health Counseling	Foundations in Human Behavior	Physiological Psychology
	Rehabilitation Counseling: Concepts and Applications	Legal and Ethical Issues in Marriage and Family Therapy	Foundations of Social Work Macro Practice	Typical and Atypical Development
	Legal, Ethical, Professional Standards and Issues in Counseling	Introduction to Systems Theory	Foundations of Social Welfare Policy	Cognitive Psychology (x2)
	Medical Aspects of Disability	Dynamics of Family Therapy	Foundations of Social Work Micro Practice	Graduate Research Methods
	Fundamentals of Substance Abuse Counseling	Assessment in Marital and Family Therapy	Diversity and Social Justice	Research Methods and Measurement (MA component)
	Individual Evaluation and Assessment	Family Therapy Theories and Techniques	Foundations of Social Work Research and Statistics	4 electives (MA component)
	Human Sexuality Counseling	Contemporary and Community Issues in Marriage and Family Therapy	Psychopathology	Personality and Social Psychology
	Human Growth and Development	Social and Cultural Foundations of Counseling	Health, Illness, and Disability	Graduate Seminar in Experimental Psychology OR Clinical-Community Psychology
	Research and Program Evaluation	Diagnosis and Treatment of Psychopathology	Social Work Practice with Individuals	Statistical Analysis for Educational Research III OR Multivariate Statistical Analysis for Aging Research
	Diagnosis and Treatment of Psychopathology	Research and Program Evaluation	Social Work Practice with Couples and Families	Research Methods and Measurement OR Advanced Educational Measurement
	Social and Cultural Foundations of Counseling	Counseling Approaches for Substance Abusers	Social Work Practice with Groups	3 electives (Ph.D. component)
	Group Theories and Practice	Human Growth and Development	Social Welfare Policy Development & Analysis	External Internship (one year, full-time)
	Career & Lifestyle Assessment	Human Sexuality Counseling	Evaluation of Clinical Practice in Diverse Setting	Dissertation
	Counseling Theories and Practice	Practicum I-IV	Field Instruction I-IV	
	Practicum in Counseling I-II; Internship	2 electives or thesis courses	2 electives (BSW), 3 electives (non-BSW)	
2 electives				

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Key:

MA = Master of Arts in Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling

MS = Master of Science in Marriage and Family Therapy

MSW = Master of Social Work

Ph.D. = Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology, Concentration in Clinical Psychology

- Assessment, Evaluation, and Testing: All four programs require at least one course in assessment/testing.
- Career Assessment/Counseling: The MA program requires a course in this content area, but the MS, MSW, and Ph.D. programs do not.
- Cognitive and Physiological Psychology: The Ph.D. program is the only program that requires coursework in this area.
- Counseling/Psychotherapy: The MA and MS programs include courses exclusively focused on theories and techniques of counseling and psychotherapy. The MSW and Ph.D. programs do not, though counseling/therapy theories may be included as part of the content of some courses.
- Disability: The MSW and MA programs both have courses exclusively focused on disability (i.e., Medical Aspects of Disability and Health, Illness, and Disability), but the Ph.D. and MS programs do not, although the Ph.D. program includes a disability-related course as an elective option.
- Ethical and Legal Issues: The MA and MS programs require a course exclusively dedicated to legal and ethical standards. The Ph.D. program does not, though such a course is available as an elective. The MSW program also does not.
- Group Counseling/Therapy/Work: The MA and MSW programs require coursework on group therapy, but the MS and Ph.D. programs do not.
- Human Growth and Development: All four programs require coursework in this area.
- Human Sexuality: The MA and MS programs require coursework exclusively focused on human sexuality. The MSW and Ph.D. programs do not, though human sexuality may be included as part of the content of some courses.
- Marriage and Family Counseling/Therapy/Work: The MSW and MS programs both require at least one course in this area, but the MS program requires the most. The MA and Ph.D. programs do not require coursework in this area.
- Policy Development and Analysis: The MSW program is the only program requiring coursework in this area.
- Practicum and Internship: All four programs require coursework in this area.
- Psychopathology: A course exclusively focused on psychopathology is required for all programs except the Ph.D. program.
- Research: All programs require at least 1 course in research, though the Ph.D. program requires more courses in comparison to the others.
- Social and Cultural Issues: All four programs include at least one course focused on social and cultural issues.
- Substance Abuse: The MA and MS programs require coursework exclusively focused on substance abuse. The MSW and Ph.D. programs do not.

Analysis: The **Clinical Mental Health Counseling** program requires more coursework on counseling and psychotherapy and career assessment and counseling than the other programs, the **Marriage and Family Therapy** program requires more coursework on marriage and family therapy than the other programs, the **Social Work program** requires more coursework on policy development and analysis and social and cultural issues than the other programs, and the **Clinical Psychology** program requires more coursework in cognitive and physiological psychology and research than the other programs.

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TABLE 3. COMPARISON OF REQUIRED COURSEWORK DOMAINS FOR GRADUATE MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL DEGREE AT UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA				
Content Domain	Clinical Mental Health Counselor	Marriage and Family Therapist	Social Worker	Clinical Psychologist
	Master of Arts (MA) in Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling	Master of Science (MS) in Marriage and Family Therapy	Master of Social Work (MSW)	Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Clinical Psychology
Assessment, Evaluation, and Testing	Individual Evaluation and Assessment; Career and Lifestyle Assessment	Assessment in Marital and Family Therapy	Evaluation of Clinical Practice in Diverse Setting	<i>Not Required*</i>
Career Assessment/Counseling	Career & Lifestyle Assessment	<i>Not Required*</i>	<i>Not Required*</i>	<i>Not Required*</i>
Cognitive and Physiological Psychology	<i>Not Required*</i>	<i>Not Required*</i>	<i>Not Required*</i>	Physiological Psychology; Cognitive Psychology (x2)
Counseling/Psychotherapy (General/Individual)	Foundations of Mental Health Counseling; Rehabilitation Counseling: Concepts and Applications; Counseling Theories and Practice	Foundations of Mental Health Counseling	<i>Not Required*</i>	<i>Not Required*</i>
Disability	Medical Aspects of Disability	<i>Not Required*</i>	Health, Illness, and Disability	<i>Not Required*</i>
Ethical and Legal Issues	Legal, Ethical, Professional Standards and Issues in Counseling	Legal and Ethical Issues in Marriage and Family Therapy	<i>Not Required*</i>	<i>Not Required*</i>
Group Counseling/Therapy/Work	Group Theories and Practice	<i>Not Required*</i>	Social Work Practice with Groups	<i>Not Required*</i>
Human Growth and Development	Human Growth & Development	Human Growth & Development	Foundations in Human Behavior	Typical and Atypical Development
Human Sexuality	Human Sexuality Counseling	Human Sexuality Counseling	<i>Not Required*</i>	<i>Not Required*</i>
Marriage and Family Counseling/Therapy/Work	<i>Not Required*</i>	Introduction to Systems Theory; Dynamics of Family Therapy; Family Therapy Theories and Techniques; Contemporary and Community Issues in Marriage and Family Therapy	Social Work Practice with Couples and Families	<i>Not Required*</i>
Policy Development and Analysis	<i>Not Required*</i>	<i>Not Required*</i>	Foundations of Social Welfare Policy; Social Welfare Policy Development & Analysis	<i>Not Required*</i>
Practicum and Internship	Practicum I; Practicum II; Internship	Practicum I-IV	Field Instruction I-IV	External Internship (one year, full-time)
Psychopathology	Diagnosis and Treatment of Psychopathology	Diagnosis and Treatment of Psychopathology	Psychopathology	<i>Not Required*</i>
Research	Research and Program Evaluation	Research and Program Evaluation	Foundations of Social Work Research and Statistics	Graduate Research Methods; Research Methods and Measurement (MA component); Statistical Analysis for Educational Research III OR Multivariate Statistical Analysis for Aging Research; Research Methods and Measurement OR Advanced Educational Measurement; Dissertation
Social and Cultural Issues	Social and Cultural Foundations of Counseling	Social and Cultural Foundations of Counseling	Foundations of Social Work Macro Practice; Diversity and Social Justice	Personality and Social Psychology
Substance Abuse	Fundamentals of Substance Abuse Counseling	Counseling Approaches for Substance Abusers	<i>Not Required*</i>	<i>Not Required*</i>

**Content may be available as an elective or included in courses with broader content, but there does not appear to be a required course that is exclusively devoted to the content domain.*