

## MFT Program Policy on Diversity

### Policy Availability

This policy is available to the public via the link to [Program Handbook and Policies](#) on the [MFT website](#).

### Policy on Diversity

The MFT program has a strong commitment to diversity in its daily operational practices, admission of students, education of students as learning therapists, and hiring of faculty. The program adheres to Valdosta State University policies on non-discrimination to guide its hiring practices. The program is committed to diversity in recruitment and hiring to assure the representation of minorities, women, and persons with disabilities.

### Student Acknowledgement of Program Commitment to Diversity

The MFT program expects students to attest by documentation (send the PD an email) that they have read and are both able and willing to abide by the program statement on diversity. During the admission process, prior to a student's commitment to accept a seat in the program, each prospective student will receive a request from the program asking for this attestation of the [MFT Diversity Statement](#).

### Diversity Statement

In alignment with the [Valdosta State University mission](#) and the [MFT Program mission](#), it is the program's responsibility to provide non-discriminatory services to clients (see [AAMFT Code of Ethics](#), Standard 1.1), and it is in the best interests of our clients, ourselves, and society as a whole that diversity is held as a core value. This means that we follow paths that connect, rather than separate people. Family therapy training and practice are relationally connective in nature. Valuing the myriad ways that we humans are both different and the same is at the heart of diversity. In the course of our work, family therapists engage in connective activities—sense-making, metaphoric and narrative understanding, and constructing contextually-driven stories. Embracing diversity is, by its nature, inclusive, connective. In fact, inclusive thinking and acting are unable to be separative or oppositional. Racism, heterosexism, classism, religious discrimination, and other “isms,” on the other hand, are always separative, intended to set a group of people apart and away. The “other”—that “other” race, that “other” sexual orientation, that “other” class, that “other” religion—are established as exclusions to a preferred default race, sexual orientation, class, or religion. Estrangement and hate are forged through separation. Love, understanding, respect, appreciation, safety and a strong multicultural and diverse educational environment are forged through connection.

The faculty of the VSU MFT program regard issues of diversity to be of utmost importance in the training and practice of family therapists. Thus, the MFT Program is committed to ensuring that issues of diversity are woven throughout the MFT educational environment in coursework, practica, internships, and student/faculty relationships. We strive to teach students that problems and clients' attempts to solve problems make sense when viewed through relevant contexts such as age, culture, environment, ethnicity, gender, health, physical ability, nationality, race, religion, sexual orientation, spirituality, socioeconomic status, and languaged meaning. These give shape and meaning to clients' lives. That these contexts are embedded in more

encompassing cultural contexts of privilege, power, subjugation, and susceptibility is a notion that is infused throughout the entire curriculum. The program emphasizes the way these contexts inform human experience and meaning systems, giving rise to multiple perspectives.

It is a foundational premise of this program that mere *tolerance* of difference (which is often based on class, race, gender, sex, gender expression, gender identity, religion or non-religious age, ethnicity, nation of origin, immigration status, language abilities, sexual orientation, veteran status, socioeconomic status, spirituality, physical or mental disability, health status, and political beliefs) is wholly insufficient. The differences that make up the rainbow weave of humanity are most properly embraced, cherished, and celebrated. Mary Catherine Bateson (1994, *Peripheral Visions*) reminds us that insight is *“that depth of understanding that comes by setting experiences, yours and mine, familiar and exotic, new and old, side by side, learning by letting them speak to one another (p. 14).”* After all, *“it is,”* she goes on, *“contrast [the relationship to 'otherness'] that makes learning possible” (p. 27).*

The relationship between diversity and the variety of dominant cultural discourses such as ageism, classism, racism, sexism, heterosexism, and gender are woven throughout the fabric of our curriculum. MFT faculty members strive to explore with our students the ways that cultural and institutionalized discrimination are embedded in culture and language, exacerbating the treatment issues that clients present. We also examine the ways that issues of diversity and discrimination shape the context of therapy. By the time students graduate from our program, they are able to situate themselves in the relational web of issues—class, privilege, and disenfranchisement—that are often at work in the therapy room.

Appreciation for the unique perspectives, life experiences, and values of clients, students, and faculty members is a prerequisite for respectful and safe relationships, whether in treatment, with colleagues, or in our personal lives. Based on the above diversity statement and in alignment with the Valdosta State University mission and the MFT Program mission, it is the program’s responsibility to provide non-discriminatory services to clients (see [AAMFT Code of Ethics](#), Standard 1.1). Faculty and students are expected to work with any family, couple, or individual seeking services at FamilyWorks or an internship. Students do not have the option to opt out of work with clients based on discriminations of class, race, gender, sex, gender expression, gender identity, religion or non-religion, age, ethnicity, nation of origin, immigration status, language abilities, sexual orientation, veteran status, socioeconomic status, spirituality, physical or mental disability, health status, or political belief. The [Valdosta State University MFT program](#) subscribes to the following:

1. Clients have a right to treatment that is *“without discrimination on the basis of race, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, gender, health status, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity or relationship status.”* ([AAMFT, 2015, Ethical Standard 1: Responsibility to Clients](#))
2. We believe that to be successful, MFT’s must possess therapeutic curiosity, be aware of ethical and therapeutic limitations, have a genuine interest in their clients, and be willing to talk openly about anything a client might wish to discuss, regardless of age, ethnicity, cultural background, national origin, spiritual belief and/or affiliation, relationship status,

socio-economic status, health status, disability or physical limitation, political leanings, and level of education.

3. The MFT faculty believe that person-to-person relational connection is the best way to forge and deepen understanding, respect, safety, cultural humility, and appreciation for those we view as different from ourselves. We are committed to teaching courses that often ask students to participate in difficult or uncomfortable discussions about race, culture, class, sexuality, or that bring out differences in political belief. We assume that our students are able to engage respectfully in such conversations, orienting themselves toward listening and hearing, rather than debate, persuasion, or contest. We assume that our MFT students can and will conduct themselves with patience, fairness, maturity, and thoughtfulness.
  4. The MFT program requires prospective students to read and give thoughtful consideration to the above diversity statement, then attest to their willingness and ability to adhere to the statement in an email to the Program Director. This written attestation is retained in the student's permanent file. If a student finds conflict with the statement or personal beliefs preclude him or her from working with certain categories of clients or certain kinds of problems, this program may not be a good fit, and the faculty will suggest that the student seek training elsewhere.
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