MFT Program Policy on Practicum and Internship

Policy Availability

This policy is available to the public via the link to Program Handbook and Policies on the MFT website.

Eligibility to Register for Practicum

Pre-requisites that must be taken or completed before a student can register *for MFTH 7600 Practicum* are as follows:

- Successful completion of service learning
- *MFTH 7102: Interventions in MFT*
- *MFTH 6800 Relational Theory, Practice, & Ethics*
- *MFTH 6900 Foundations in MFT*
- *MFTH 7101 Family Systems Theories*
- *MFTH 7102 Interventions in MFT*
- *MFTH 7050 Diversity, Inclusion, and Social Justice*
- *MFTH 7500 Development in the Family System*
- Successful completion of Comprehensive Exam I

1 Year of Continuous Enrollment in Practicum is Required

Students must remain continuously enrolled in *MFTH 7600 Practicum* across three consecutive semesters for one calendar year (Summer-Fall-Spring or Fall-Spring-Summer). Should a 2nd year student take a semester with no practicum, the clock re-sets, and he or she will have to begin the consecutive sequence all over the next time he or she enrolls in practicum (see Policy on Advising for more information).

Accrual of Clinical Hours

Consistent with our mission and program goals to teach therapeutic practice, live real-world therapy with clients, and supervision with AAMFT Approved faculty supervisors are the program's pièce de résistance. All students must accrue client and supervision contact hours in the following ratios:

- As per Georgia las, 500 total hours of client contact, of which at least 40% (200 hours) must be relational (family and couples).
- A minimum of 150 hours at FamilyWorks
- 100 hours of supervision, 50% of which must be observable data (live, audio, and/or video recordings).

Specific requirements for client and supervision contact hours are as follows:

1. A minimum of 500 client contact hours. Of the 500 hours,
    a. a minimum of 100 face-to-face hours must be accrued at FamilyWorks.
    b. 40% of the 500 hours must be "relational"—face-to-face with families and/or couples
    c. 100 may be alternative hours (behind-the-mirror, co-therapy, reflecting teams)

2. 100 hours of face-to-face supervision hours. Of the 100 supervision hours,
    a. a minimum of 50 must be based on raw data (live, direct observation, video- or

electronic recording, reflecting teams, behind the mirror)

b. all must be with a GA licensed, AAMFT Approved Supervisor or Supervisor track, which means that all must occur at FamilyWorks MFT faculty member. Supervision at internship sites is considered administrative in nature and is not be counted toward the 100 required hours.

3. All practica meet weekly. During the time that students are enrolled in practicum, they receive supervision every week that they see cases. During official national holidays, when clients will not be seen, supervision is not required.

4. If the student has not accrued the required client contact or supervision hours at the end of the year, he or she must re-enroll in *MFTH 7600 Practicum in Marriage and Family Therapy* (space permitting) or *MFTH 7980 Internship in Marriage and Family Therapy* until the required therapy and supervision hours have been accrued (see Policy on Practicum).

5. All students are required to have liability insurance and must maintain continuous coverage while enrolled in *MFTH 7600 Practicum in Marriage and Family Therapy* or *MFTH 7980 Internship in Marriage and Family Therapy*.

6. Students are required to join AAMFT, which membership avails them of a liability insurance policy.

7. Students may choose to participate in an off-campus internship.

Supervisory Release to See Clients

Once your supervisor has seen you work to a sufficient degree that he or she can ascertain 1.) whether or not you will do clients no harm, 2.) be able to ask productive "beginning" questions of clients, and 3.) conduct yourself in a professional manner, your supervisor will "release" you to see clients on your own (by yourself or with a co-therapist) in the clinic outside of the immediate presence of a supervisor behind the mirror. Your supervisor knows that you will likely not be at the stage at which you can facilitate 2nd order change; however, he or she knows that you are able to begin thinking about the problem definition and the relevant contexts that inform and shape the problem. Once released, you will receive the following email which instructs you to fill out an Availability sheet, after which the Clinic Coordinator will place your name on the rotation list.

Date:

Dear Student,

Congratulations! I am formally releasing you to work as a therapist on your own at FamilyWorks, which means that you may work outside of the immediate presence of an observing supervisor in one of the two following ways:

You may work at FamilyWorks

___as a single therapist

___with a co-therapist

Release also indicates that you have successfully met the following criteria:

- You are able to introduce yourself and FamilyWorks (policies, procedures, confidentiality, videotaping, etc.) to clients in a warm and professional manner. (SLO 4)
- You attend practicum regularly, arrive prepared and on-time, and you are actively engaged throughout the required period. (SLO 3)
- You are keeping appropriate and thorough records, documenting therapy and contact with clients and other systems. (SLO 3)
- You do not offer simplistic advice and personal opinions. (SLO 2)
- You limit self-disclosure to occasions of specific therapeutic utility. (SLO 6)
- You follow clinic policy (paperwork, follow-up, referrals, etc.) and attend to legal and ethical issues. (SLO 6)

You are expected to complete an *Availability Sheet* and submit it to the Clinic Coordinator. She will add your name to the rotation list once she receives your *Availability Sheet*. Please remember to update your availability sheet weekly, if not more frequently. At the very least, your schedule will change each time you take on a new client or finish up with an old client. If your schedule hasn't changed in a given week, and no substantive changes need to be made to your availability, then just change the date at the top of the sheet. This will indicate that you've made a recent update.

You are expected to administer the *Client Satisfaction Survey* on the 1st session and every 5th session thereafter as well as the final session. Please follow the procedure for assigning Apex numbers to your clients. If you have questions about this or anything regarding your release, please let the clinic coordinator or your supervisor know.

Congratulations!

Best,

Your Supervisor
(Name of Supervising Faculty Member)

Supervisors talk on a regular (monthly) basis about clinically active student. If faculty have concerns about your ability to conduct therapeutic conversations with clients, your immediate supervisor will meet with you individually.

When All Client Contact Hours Have Not Been Accrued in One Year

Unlike master's level training in many other fields (biology, math, accounting), your training relies on clients. There are many factors that can make this unreliable and inconsistent, including seasonal changes (e.g., Christmas, Halloween, school breaks), internship sites, client type, case difficulty, and many other human variables. Clients cancel or leave therapy for a wide variety of reasons. Neither the MFT faculty, the program, nor the university can guarantee that the entire 500-hour client contact requirement can be accrued in the one year of continuous enrollment, although most students do. If the student has not accrued the required client contact or supervision hours by the end of the year of three practica, he or she must remain enrolled in the university, show documentation of an ongoing liability insurance policy, and remain under the supervision of an AAMFT Approved Supervisor faculty member. This requires that the student enroll in either *MFTH 7980 Internship in MFT* or *MFTH 7600 Clinical Practicum,* space permitting. If outstanding hours remain the end of a fourth clinical semester, an additional semester or semesters are required until all required client contact and supervision hours are met.

If you opt to take *MFTH 7980 Internship in MFT*, you will need to ask the faculty member you would prefer as your supervisor. He or she will need to agree to be your instructor/supervisor of record for the course. Once agreed, he or she will create a syllabus with you that outlines the course requirements. While there is flexibility in the construction of the syllabus (readings, assignments, etc.), you are required to meet for supervision at least once a week during any week that you are seeing clients.

Carrying a Caseload at FamilyWorks is a Program Requirement

It is at FamilyWorks that your clinical work is video recorded, availing both you and your supervisors of the best opportunity to observe your work, so that you can consult together in face-to-face supervisory conversations. Further, it is at FamilyWorks that you work closely with AAMFT Approved, systemically trained, and Georgia licensed family therapy faculty.

Policy on Early Start Practicum (ESP)

Assuming a 2-year plan of study, MFT students typically start their clinical work in the first semester of their second year (2-1). However, when practicum seats are available, eligible first year students may register for *MFTH 7600: Practicum in Marriage and Family Therapy* and begin their clinical work in the summer of their first year.

Eligibility for ESP: The number of 1st year students admitted to summer practicum is limited to the space available on the summer practica teams as well as the needs of the FamilyWorks Clinic. Students who wish to be considered for early admission into practicum must . . . .

1. be a regularly admitted student (rather than probationary admission)
2. successfully complete the Comprehensive Exam I**.**
3. be willing to defer taking *MFTH 7700 Assessment in MFT* until the 2nd summer semester
4. be willing to defer taking *MFTH Psychopathology & Psychopharmacology* until the 2nd summer semester
5. be able and willing to stay on campus during the summer semester to attend practicum each week, transition onto new cases, assume supervisor approval, and take on new cases during June, July, and August.

Selection Process: MFT faculty look at course projections to get a close estimate of how many practicum slots are available for any given semester.

1. The MFT faculty then put out a call for those interested in ESP which includes the notification that interested students will have to submit their Comprehensive Exam I early, since Comp I is a pre-requisite for *MFTH 7600 Practicum in Marriage and Family Therapy.*
2. Students notify the Clinic Director of their interest and request inclusion in the early practicum lottery drawing.
3. A lottery drawing date and time is established and advertised in advance.
4. A lottery drawing, open to all students and faculty, is held in the MFT classroom.
5. MFT faculty facilitate a name draw until all of the predetermined early admissions practicum slots have been filled. A second draw is done to establish a list of ESP alternates.
    - Early Practicum Alternates: In the event that someone is unable to fulfill the early practicum requirements, regardless of reason, an alternate *may* be called upon to take their place. For this reason, alternates must be able to meet all of the requirements. Alternates are called upon in the order they were drawn during the ESP drawing.

Internships are Your Choice

Students may take an internship, which will help with accruing the required hours, provide an invaluable feel for the inside of the American mental health system, and add value to student experience and resumes.

Please see the Clinical Coordinator for further information and assistance finding an internship or settling problems that you might have during an internship.

Procedure for Reporting, Discussing, and Resolving Internship Problems

The following establishes the procedure for dealing with problems when the site, a site supervisor, or the student is having difficulties at an internship:

A. **Responsibilities of the Student**
    - Assuming awareness on the part of the student that there is a difficulty, he or she should begin by contacting the MFT Program Clinic Director, Tabitha McCoy (229) 293-6266 or his/her faculty supervisor. The discussion during this contact should seek to understand the problem from the student's perspective, discuss possible solutions, decide who would be involved in the solutions and what additional contacts or meetings need to occur, and create a plan for resolving the problem.
    - If the Clinic Director/Faculty supervisor adjudges that the problem needs further input from the Program Director or the faculty, he or she should inform the student of this, and move the discussion on to the next level.

B. **Responsibilities of the Site/Site Supervisor**
    - Assuming awareness on the part of the site supervisor that there is a difficulty, he or she should begin by contacting the MFT Program Clinic Director, Tabitha McCoy (229) 293-6266 or his/her faculty supervisor. The discussion during this contact should seek to understand the problem from the Site/Supervisor's perspective, learn who is/would be involved in the solutions, what additional contacts or meetings need to occur. If a

plan for resolving the problem is not initiated in this conversation, further conversations should be scheduled for the purpose of doing so.

- If the VSU Clinic Director/Faculty supervisor adjudges that the problem needs further input from the Program Director or the faculty, he or she should inform the Site Supervisor of this, and move the discussion on to the next level.

C. **Responsibilities of the Program/Clinical Director/Faculty Supervisor**

- The MFT Program will be responsible for taking all reasonable measures to:
  - learn the nature of the problem based on the wider context in which it is embedded. This will include speaking with the involved parties (student, site supervisor, relevant others).
  - work with the Site/Site supervisor and/or the student to discover/devise a solution that takes into consideration the best treatment of clients, if clients are involved; fair treatment of all concerned (student, site supervisor, etc.); the student's education and training; and, any and all legal and ethical considerations
  - take the problem to the Program Director if/when, a plan for resolving the problem cannot be created.
  - Depending on the nature of the problem, others may be brought into awareness and discussion of the problem. These might include the Department Head, college Dean, and/or the university attorney.

Transferring Clients

When second year students finish their clinical rotation and prepare to graduate, they may have clients on their caseloads who wish to continue therapy. To meet the highest standard of care for our clients, the process by which clients are transferred from one therapist to another must be clear, rigorous, regimented, and formal. Each practicum supervisor will assign a day to discuss the transferring process as well as provide supervision for cases being transferred. These clients will be transferred to rising 2nd year Early Start Practicum (ESP) students in Summer practica.

1. Students and supervisors should start talking about transferring cases around mid-term, about 8 weeks before the end of the semester so that there is adequate time to have thoughtful discussions, find a new therapist(s), and enable the new therapist(s) to have at least 3 sessions with the client and the transferring therapist(s).
2. All practica syllabi will include a section on "Transferring Clients" in the course schedule or point students to this policy. For the Spring/Fall semesters, this discussion should be listed for the week after midterm, and for the Summer semester, this discussion should be listed for the first day of the course for cases that were transferred into the summer practicum from previous practica. New cases should be taken up for discussion at least 4 weeks before the end of summer practicum.
3. To ensure that all interns are prepared for this process, therapists will read *Guidelines for an Effective Transfer of Cases: The Needs of the Transfer Triad* (Williams & Winter, 2009). Therapists will discuss this article and review the steps to complete a successful transfer at the following times:
   - Spring and Summer practicum
   - Early Start Practica (ESP) Student Meeting
   - Professional Issues course

- Second-year orientation meeting

4. Transferring therapist(s) must maintain their case load for no less than two weeks before the end of the summer practicum.
5. Each MFT intern will complete and submit the *Client Transfer Form*. This form will be completed in stages as the therapist and supervisor make decisions about the clients, and when/how they will be transferred. The Transferring form should be completed by both the transferring therapist(s) and the rising (incoming) ESP therapist(s) in order to track the cases being transferred and engage both therapists in the process.
6. Supervisors must sign off on all transfers to ensure that the process has been correctly followed.
7. If therapist(s) are unable to reach clients with open files who have not attended therapy for a few weeks but who indicated a wish to continue therapy, the transferring therapist(s) must properly inform the client by using the *Transferring Letter Template.*
8. If the transferring therapist(s) was seeing a client who is currently unreachable (phone turned off, not returning messages from therapist, etc.), the therapist will send the client a letter using the *"Closing/Therapist Leaving"* letter template.

Things to think about when talking about the transfer process:

1. Transitioning clients should be thoughtful, sit-down conversations (no "hallway conversations") between the rising therapist(s) and transitioning therapist(s), and ideally with a supervisor when possible.
2. Rising therapist(s) and especially ESP therapists do not have to take each and every client that is offered to them. It is important that new therapists not become overwhelmed with an instant, large caseload.
3. Rising therapist(s) must pay attention to the number of clients on their caseload.
4. Transferring therapist(s) must not assume that a particular intern has to take their case.

Steps to Transferring a Case: Transferring Therapist

1. The transfer process should minimally include these:
    a. the rising therapist(s) watch a session or two on Endura
    b. meet the client
    c. observe (behind the mirror, in the room) at least twice
    d. engage in a transferring session in which all parties are present before the transferring therapist comes off the case. This process can be adjusted to best fit a particular case with supervisor permission.

    Do not begin transferring your cases until your practicum supervisor has given permission for this process to occur.
2. Knowing that you will be graduating in a matter of weeks, begin having conversations with your clients about the necessity of transferring, what the process entails, and how you can work together to tailor the transfer to best fit the client's needs. This conversation should occur prior to the new therapist(s) meeting the client.
3. Identify which clients need to be transferred, which clients need to take a break from therapy, and which will have their case file closed.

4. Discuss the *Client Transfer Form* with your supervisor and together decide who of the new rising therapists might be a good fit for your client. Also discuss, when to have the rising therapist observe, when to hold the transferring session with rising therapist present, and when the case will be officially handed over to the rising therapist and new supervisor. when to have the new therapist observe, when to have the new therapist present in the room, and the last date of attendance by the original therapist(s). When possible, this should occur with all rising and transferring therapists, as well as their supervisor
5. After you have identified an rising therapist to whom you will transfer the case, establish a time to meet with her or him to discuss the case and the transfer process.
    a. Use the case presentation form to summarize each transfer case and discuss this information with the rising therapist(s). The case presentation form must be included in the client's case file at the end of the transfer process.
    b. Transferring and rising therapist will consider the questions posed on the *Client Transfer Form*.

    Keep the supervisor updated as you progress through this process.
6. Complete the *Client Transfer Form* (to the extent possible) and continue to update it as you navigate through the transfer process.
7. If a letter has been sent, the transferring therapist(s) should inform the rising therapist(s) or rising therapist(s).
8. The transferring therapist(s) should submit the transferring form and case presentation to the clinical director.

Steps to Transferring a Case: Rising (Incoming) Therapist

1. Inform both the Clinical Coordinator and your supervisor, if/when a graduating student has asked to transfer a case to you.
2. Once you receive your supervisor's or the Clinical Coordinator's approval, you may start the transfer process. You and the therapist transferring the case will use the *Client Transfer Form* to track each case and update it as you progress through the transfer process. Keep the supervisor updated as you go.
3. Before you take possession of the case, have a meeting to discuss the case (case presentation is given by the transferring therapist) and to respond to the questions posed on the transferring form.
4. The transferring therapist(s) will be having conversations with the client(s) about the transferring process prior to having you meet the client(s) or observe the case. Ask the transferring therapist about these conversations—how the client is responding, how they are orienting to a transfer of therapist, etc.
5. Watch a session or two on Endura, meet the client, observe (behind the mirror and in the room) at least twice, and engage in a transferring session in which all parties are present before the transferring therapist comes off the case. This process can be adjusted to best fit a particular case with supervisor/clinical manager permission.

If a Rising Therapist is Not Available to Take the Case

If a rising therapist is not available to take an existing client, therapists will instead talk with clients about taking a break from therapy until the new semester begins in August.

- The Clinical Coordinator keeps a running list of clients who wish to take a break but return in August. If your client would like to be put on the list, we will be happy to check back in with them in August.
- Clients on the Return to FamilyWorks List will be contacted by their new therapist as soon as the new semester begins.
- If your client wishes to see a private practitioner, direct your client to the link on the MFT webpage that lists VSU MFT Graduates in private practice. Let clients know that therapists in private practice will charge a fee or charge insurance, although some may offer reduced rates. Remind them that they are always welcome to return to FamilyWorks in August.