Middle Tennessee State University

Professional Counseling Major
Mental Health Counseling (MHC) Concentration

Frequently Asked Questions

1. I noticed that March 1 is the deadline to submit my application materials for review by the Professional Counseling faculty to be considered for admission into the mental health counseling program. What if I can't meet that deadline for some reason (e.g., have not yet taken the Graduate Record Exam/GRE). Can I still take classes?

Good question! Traditionally, students have been admitted into our school counseling concentration twice a year – once in the spring and once in the fall. However, given that the mental health counseling concentration is new, the Professional Counseling faculty is allowing students to apply anytime throughout the course of the next year. Simply go to the College of Graduate Studies website (http://www.mtsu.edu/~graduate/apply.htm) and click on “Apply Online” and select “Professional Counseling, Mental Health Counseling” as the program for which you are applying.

If you have not yet taken the Graduate Record Exam, then you can still apply as a “non-degree seeking student.” As a non-degree seeking student, you may take up to 12 hours of coursework in the Mental Health Counseling program. Once you hit the 12-hour mark, you may not take any more courses until you are officially admitted into the program. By this time, however, most students will have gotten their application materials together (e.g., will have taken the GRE) and can apply for program admission.

One risk that you run in applying as a non-degree seeking student is that you could take the initial three or four classes and then apply for admission, yet not be accepted into the program because you were not competitive (e.g., your GRE scores were too low). However, given that this is the first year we are offering the MHC program at MTSU, we probably won’t have a high volume of students who apply to the program, thus, your chances are better.

If you wish to be admitted as a non-degree seeking student, you may apply online through the College of Graduate Studies website (http://www.mtsu.edu/~graduate/apply.htm). Applicants wishing to be admitted as non-degree seeking students must:

1. complete an application for graduate admission;
2. pay an application fee;
3. submit an official transcript certifying receipt of the bachelor’s degree.

If you have not yet graduated with your bachelor’s degree, then you may apply to the graduate school once you receive your degree and still be eligible to take courses in the summer and fall. It would be helpful if you contacted Dr. Quarto (MHC program coordinator) to inform him of your intent to apply to the program (cquarto@mtsu.edu).

2. I’m concerned about the GRE. What if I don’t obtain a score of at least 1000? Will I still be eligible to be admitted into the MHC program?

This is a question that concerns many students. The Professional Counseling faculty intentionally set the bar higher for this program than other master’s degree programs in the Department of Psychology because of what students will be eligible to do once they obtain their degree. Specifically, graduates will have met the educational requirements to be licensed as professional counselors with mental health service provider designation (LPC MHSP), the highest level of licensure for counselors in the state of Tennessee. With this license, individuals can “practice their trade” unsupervised, as opposed to master’s level clinical psychologists, who must be supervised by a doctoral-level psychologist. Thus, we as a Professional Counseling faculty are obligated to protect the public by ensuring we select the highest qualified applicants from the get-go.

With that being said, please understand that a GRE score of 1000 is required for unconditional admission into the program. It is possible that some applicants may have scored slightly below the 1000 mark (e.g., 950, 960); yet because they are strong in other areas will be considered for conditional admission. Students who are conditionally admitted must perform well in their first 12 hours of coursework (i.e., obtain a 3.25 GPA) to continue in the program.

If you took the GRE and obtained a score below 900, then it is recommended that you either retake the GRE or not apply to the program. There are GRE preparation guides that can be purchased at bookstores such as Borders and Walden Books. In addition, you might want to consider looking over GRE preparation programs offered by companies such as Kaplan (www.kaptest.com).

3. What classes do you recommend I take first in the MHC program? It is always a good idea to check with Dr. Quarto first before signing up for classes. Generally speaking, there are “foundations” courses that should be taken early in your program. If you decided to start taking classes in the summer, then “Theories of Counseling” (PSY 5470) and “Multicultural Perspectives in Psychology and Education” (PSY 5720) would be good courses to sign up for. If you choose to start your coursework in the fall, then “Foundations of Mental Health Counseling” (PSY 5655) and “Legal and Ethical Issues in Counseling” (PSY 6230) would definitely be two courses you would want to take and, if you had time, “Theories of Personality” (PSY 6020).

The Professional Counseling faculty schedules many classes during the late afternoon or early evening hours and on the weekends to...
accommodate students who work during the day. However, given that many psychology professors outside of the Professional Counseling faculty teach courses that are part of the MHC curriculum, we cannot guarantee that courses will always be offered at these times.

4. Are there scholarships or assistantships available to help pay for my education? Graduate assistantships are limited and competitive. They are available for 10 or 20 hours per week. Graduate students assist faculty members with both teaching and research. Graduate assistants perform a wide variety of duties, depending on faculty needs and on the assistant's skills and background. The Graduate Curriculum committee of the Department of Psychology selects graduate assistants from a pool of applicants each spring and fall. The "MTSU Application for Graduate Assistantship" can be found on the College of Graduate Studies website at http://www.mtsu.edu/~graduate/student/gtas.htm You may contact the Department of Psychology's graduate secretary, Anna Littlepage, for further information (alittlep@mtsu.edu).

The Department of Psychology awards the Robert E. Prytula Memorial Scholarship in the amount of $500.00 each spring. Further information about scholarships available to graduate students can be obtained by visiting the College of Graduate Studies website at:
http://www.mtsu.edu/~graduate/student/scholarship.htm

You may also be interested in the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) Loan Repayment Program for Licensed Professional Counselors (see below).

NHSC Loan Repayment Program Opportunities for Licensed Professional Counselors

(Students may have their graduate school loans paid for by participating in this program!)

The National Health Service Corps (NHSC) Loan Repayment Program (LRP) currently has job openings for mental health professionals, including licensed professional counselors, in health professional shortage areas (HPSAs). The purpose of the NHSC is to improve the health needs of underserved Americans by bringing together communities in need and quality health care programs. The NHSC is operated by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The Program is highly competitive and receives limited federal funding.

The NHSC LRP identifies fully trained and licensed mental health and other health care professionals who are dedicated to meeting the health care needs of medically underserved communities. The Program makes contract awards to clinicians for service at community sites eligible under the NHSC in designated health professional shortage areas. In exchange for this service, participants receive funds for the repayment of their qualifying educational loans that are still owed, plus tax assistance, and a salary.

Mental health professionals eligible for the NHSC LRP are licensed professional counselors, clinical or counseling psychologists, psychiatrists, clinical social workers, psychiatric nurse specialists and marriage and family therapists. LPCs must be state licensed or certified and able to practice independently and unsupervised. School and Career LPCs are not eligible to participate in the loan repayment program.

The NHSC Opportunities List provides information on communities that are currently recruiting clinicians and is an ongoing process for the NHSC. The Opportunities List is updated on a weekly basis and can be found at http://nhsc.bhpr.hrsa.gov/jobs. Applications for the NHSC LRP positions listed must be postmarked on or before March 25, 2005. Additional information can be obtained by calling the NHSC Helpline at 800-221-9393 or by e-mail at nhsc@hrsa.gov.

5. What are the job prospects for mental health counselors/licensed professional counselors? According to the federal government's Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Demand is expected to be strong for substance abuse, mental health and marriage and family therapists and for rehabilitation counselors, for a variety of reasons. The increasing availability of funds to build statewide networks to improve services for children and adolescents with serious emotional disturbances and their family members should increase employment opportunities for counselors. Under managed care systems, insurance companies increasingly provide for reimbursement of counselors, enabling many counselors to move from schools and government agencies to private practice" (http://www.bls.gov/oco/occd067.htm# outlook).

The emergence of managed care companies has dramatically changed how mental health services are delivered and, more importantly, who is allowed to offer these services. Managed care companies contract with mental health providers to be part of their provider panels. Providers agree to provide services at a lower cost in exchange for an increase in the number of referrals that are sent their way by the managed care company (with the theory that an increase in volume will offset the income that is lost through lower fees). Master's level providers are very attractive to managed care companies because they offer services at a lower rate to begin with. The demand for licensed professional counselors has increased dramatically among managed care companies and insurance companies and this trend will continue in the future.

Additionally, there was a major change in the psychologist licensure law in the state of Tennessee in November, 2001. As of December, 2004, the state will no longer issue licenses to individuals who are trained in master's-level clinical psychology programs. Graduates of master's-level clinical psychology programs will no longer be allowed to provide psychotherapy/counseling services, thus administrators of mental health agencies will be looking for alternative providers, such as mental health counselors, to fill this void.

6. I already have a master's degree and just need to complete a few courses to become eligible for licensure as a professional counselor. Can I take courses at MTSU for this purpose? No. The Professional Counseling faculty has agreed to train individuals to become licensed professional counselors only if they complete the entire master's degree program. Given the high level of responsibility involved in practicing as a licensed professional counselor (i.e., independent practice), we believe it is important for students to obtain training in an organized, sequentially-based program under our tutelage.