

Department of Psychology
Master of Science Program
Program Performance Review 2022
Response to Site Visit Report

The M.S. program is grateful to the site visit team, composed of Drs. Lori Barker, Leah Brew and Laura Ibarra. They requested and reviewed voluminous documentation of every facet of the program, and on Wednesday March 23, they spent the day on campus. They met with several constituencies: administrators, full- and part-time faculty both inside and outside the program, department staff, representatives of off-campus internship sites, and current students in various stages of their education. The site visit team conducted a thorough and comprehensive investigation of all aspects of the program—academic and clinical. They prepared a report that fairly and accurately acknowledges the strengths of the program and enumerates areas that deserve continued focus. Their incisive recommendations resonate with the ongoing discussions program faculty members have been having during the past two years regarding changes in the program, providing a roadmap for future growth.

Much of this growth can be accomplished by the program on its own, while other changes require assistance from the Psychology Department, the college and the university. In particular, the program needs external support for hiring additional faculty members to fill in gaps in faculty expertise and to achieve the crucial goal of diversifying the faculty, so that it more closely matches the demographics of students in the program and meets the diversity needs of the local community.

Strengths

The site visit team endorsed the uniqueness of the CSUF M.S. program. Hewing to the scientist-practitioner model—with the twin goals of preparing students to be effective clinicians and competent researchers capable of conducting their own studies—enables the M.S. program to fill an important niche that is complementary to CSUF's M.S. program in Counseling. While the two programs share some similar goals—i.e., producing licensed clinicians to serve Southern California's diverse communities—there are important differences in philosophy, environment and educational approach between the two programs, allowing them to meet the needs of distinct sets of students.

A primary difference between the clinical psychology program and the counseling program is that the M.S. in psychology can serve as a steppingstone to doctoral study for individuals who completed their undergraduate work either unsure of their post-graduate plans or without sufficient experience to attain admission to a doctoral program. This aspect positions the M.S. program to be particularly valuable for students from historically marginalized communities, who may have lacked access during their undergraduate program to resources such as mentorship needed to make them competitive for doctoral program admission.

The site visit team highlighted that the program provides high quality training to students from diverse backgrounds, citing how supervisors at agencies where M.S. students intern report that the program produces psychotherapists who stand out for bringing critical thinking skills to bear on their work with clients. Because most graduates of the M.S. program become licensed psychotherapists, the team's conclusion that students' "preparation to become marriage and family therapists is excellent" is a significant endorsement of the program's accomplishment of its primary mission.

Other specific strengths of the M.S. program noted are:

- It produces students who are "competent to conduct research."

- Demand for the program is strong.
- The program coordinator is committed to serving the needs of the students and is responsive to them.
- The program seeks to enhance the cultural competency of its students.
- The fieldwork process is managed effectively, which enables students to meet State of California licensure requirements.

Critiques and Areas for Growth

The site visitors also gave multiple critiques of the program and made recommendations for future areas of growth. By and large, their recommendations are consistent with ideas that program faculty discussed in the PPR self-study narrative.

Departmental lack of understanding of program. The site visitors noted that Psychology Department faculty who do not teach in the program "seemed to not understand its scope and purpose" and do "not seem to understand the resources needed to run such a program." This is an ongoing problem of long standing in the Psychology Department.

The site visitors recommended that M.S. program faculty prepare a presentation for the Psychology Department at large to inform them about the program's aims and activities. They also recommended adding a non-clinical faculty member to the M.S. Graduate Studies Committee, who would serve as a conduit for information between the M.S. program and the department as a whole.

Action plan: The program will prepare a presentation that could be given at a future faculty meeting. The program will also discuss with the department chair adding a non-clinical faculty member to the MSGS.

Coordinator succession. The current coordinator has been in the position for many years. In anticipation of his approaching retirement, the site visit team recommends electing a co-coordinator, whom the current coordinator would train. The two co-coordinators would share oversight of the program for a three-year term. The team also asserts the importance of the new co-coordinator's having a strong record of cultural competence. The team also recommended creating a written job description.

Action plan: The site visitors' plan for electing and training a successor to the current coordinator makes sense. It will be important to ensure that the cultural competence experience of the new co-coordinator is an explicit part of the election process.

Additionally, the MSGS hopes that those individuals with the greatest understanding of the responsibilities of the coordinator have the greatest influence on who is elected.

There currently is a description of the responsibilities of the M.S. coordinator in the department's Administrative Handbook. This description will be clarified and expanded as necessary.

MSGS meetings. The site visit team reported that the frequency of meetings of the MSGS was "inconsistent." Part of this may be due to several faculty members, in recent years, being on leave at various times. Even more important is the team's noting that part-time faculty members would like more communication from the program about students and curriculum content. The site visitors recommend regular meetings of the MSGS that include a non-clinical appointee. They also recommend sharing more broadly with all instructors in the program and the Department the content of discussions about curriculum.

Action plan: For the past two years, the MSGS has been meeting about once a month, before department faculty meetings. The MSGS will meet regularly to continue ongoing discussions and will include a non-clinical member. The program will also hold a meeting

of all instructional faculty—full- and part-time—on an annual or semi-annual basis to make sure that all those who teach in the program have the same information.

Curriculum. The site visitors recommend updating program curriculum, with a focus on incorporating more material on evidence-based treatments and working with diverse populations. They also recommended incorporating in every class—as documented in syllabi—more material from a family systems perspective, the recovery model, and cultural competence. In particular, they called for adjusting the sequencing of classes to prepare students for their fieldwork experience during their second year. The team reported that "students asked that course content be tied more directly to the specific knowledge and skills they will need for working with the populations they will encounter at their practicum placements" and that some of the classes lacked the rigor students expected at the graduate level. Finally, students expressed frustration about "the lack of cultural competence and sensitivity on the part of some faculty" and "gave concerning examples of microaggressions and 'gaslighting' in the classroom."

The team strongly endorsed the program's current effort to reassess the ordering of courses, so that the classes most critical to preparing students for fieldwork are taken during the first year in the program. They also recommended updating content within classes, especially concerning theory and crisis, with more focus on evidence-based practices.

The team recommended against a change the M.S. faculty have been considering: a two-course sequence in cultural competency. Rather they recommended focusing more on incorporating cultural competence into all coursework throughout the curriculum. They suggest that all syllabi should contain language about how culture relates to the content of the class. They note that syllabi should be updated to "clearly reflect the new 2022 scope of practice laws for the LMFT," including marriage and family principles, recovery-oriented care and the impact of culture and socioeconomic position. Finally, the team endorsed the change currently under consideration of creating a clinical alternative to Psyc 510—Research Design.

Action plan: The recommendations of the site visitors resonate with the ambitions of the M.S. faculty—to reassess and alter the program curriculum to best prepare students for their careers. The MSGS will continue ongoing discussions about course content and ordering. In addition, faculty members are grateful for the recommendation about the new 2022 law. Bringing part-time program faculty into this discussion will ensure that all coursework satisfies BBS requirements for licensure.

The plan to replace Psyc 510 with an M.S.-specific alternative would benefit students by (a) removing the Psyc 465—Advanced Stats prerequisite and (b) tailoring the content of the class to clinical phenomena. The MSGS will continue developing this plan.

The reports of microaggressions and gaslighting in the classroom are most disturbing. The program is committed to providing an inclusive environment in which students feel supported and valued. For the past two years, an elected graduate student representative has attended meetings of the MSGS to make sure that student voices are heard during the decision-making process. This also promotes transparency of program decisions for students.

Dropping the LPCC requirement. While preparing the PPR self-study, it became clear to the M.S. faculty that adding preparation for the LPCC license several years ago increased the burden on students, who already have a heavy load of classes, clinical work and thesis research. The site visitors seconded that conclusion. They recommended dropping LPCC preparation from the program, which would reduce the number of clinical hours students need to accrue and give students more freedom in choosing elective courses.

Action plan: The faculty will remove LPPC preparation from the program, while maintaining preparation for the MFT license.

Hiring full-time faculty. The site visitors noted that the "program could benefit from hiring more racially diverse faculty members who have expertise in marriage and family therapy." Because some students in the program conduct psychotherapy in Spanish, the site visitors recommend hiring a new faculty member with expertise in bilingual and bicultural counseling for Spanish speakers. The site visitors recommend that this person be a tenure track faculty member who only teaches in the program, one who is "ideally from a diverse background (particularly with an expertise in providing psychotherapy with Latinx clients and is bilingual in Spanish), who has demonstrated a commitment to anti-racism and dismantling white supremacy cultural values." Hiring such a faculty member would address many of the areas of growth the site visitors noted.

Action plan: This recommendation fits with the commitment of the Psychology Department, as a whole, to diversity, equity and inclusion. The program will ask the department to search for a new tenure track clinical faculty member with expertise in family therapy, particularly serving a Latinx clientele. This new faculty member's primary teaching focus would be graduate classes in the M.S. program.

Dropping GRE test. The site visit team recommended that the program drop the GRE test as part of the application.

Action plan: The M.S. program will drop the GRE from its admission requirements.

Assessment. The site visit team described the program's assessment procedure as "rather generalized and imprecise." They recommend using a BBS template for evaluating clinical skills. They also recommend providing more details about the evaluation process in the Student Handbook, including the evaluation form. They suggested that evaluation results should be discussed verbally with each student and that the remediation process should be detailed in the Student Handbook.

Action plan: There seems to be some conflation in the site visit report of assessment and evaluation. Evaluation of students is done on an individual basis to make sure all students (a) are academically progressing satisfactorily toward completing their degrees and (b) have the personal fitness necessary to do psychotherapy with vulnerable populations. Assessment, on the other hand, is the collection of aggregate data used for determining the program's overall effectiveness at meeting student learning outcomes. While there is clearly some overlap between these two activities, they are separate practices with independent though complementary goals.

Prior to the pandemic, the coordinator of the program met individually with students to discuss the evaluation letters students received following their first semester in the program; this practice will resume next year. The program will also investigate the BBS template for evaluating clinical skills and consider incorporating it into the evaluation process. The forms being used can easily be added to the Student Handbook.

Regarding remediation, it actually is a very rare occurrence in the program for a student's performance to be judged so lacking that there is a need for remediation. Still, the topic of evaluation of students—including doing a second evaluation in spring of first year to clear students for beginning fieldwork the following year—continues to be important to the program faculty. The recommendations of the site visitors will help frame these ongoing discussions. Overall, it is the goal of the program faculty for the evaluation process to benefit students and for students to have a clear understanding of what is being evaluated, by whom and according to what standards.

Thesis expectations. The site visitors noted that some faculty reported that M.S. students were "surprised at the level of rigor required to complete their thesis." The site visitors recommend informing students clearly about "what it means to complete a research thesis," including several rounds of editing.

Action plan: There currently is a full page of the Student Handbook that discusses the thesis process. It includes the language, "Expect to submit numerous drafts of your thesis before it is approved." The program coordinator covers this information during the new student orientation, which takes place before students begin the program. The thesis requirement is also discussed explicitly during the open house/interviews for prospective students. The M.S. faculty will get input from advanced students to make sure the language of this discussion clearly matches students' experiences with the thesis. We will add clarification and elaboration as needed.

Fieldwork contract. The site visitors recommended revising the current Fieldwork contract to add the expiration date of supervisors' licenses, to make sure that students are not left in the lurch should a supervisor's license expire during internship.

Action plan: We will add a space for this information to the current contract.