

## **UTRGV School Psychology Program: Fitness to Practice Policy DRAFTED 02-16-15**

This Fitness to Practice Policy applies to all students upon enrollment in the School Psychology Program, and remains in effect until completion of the Program. It is important to note that satisfying the curricular requirements is not sufficient for completion of the School Psychology Program. In addition to satisfactory completion of the academic requirements and standards of the UTRGV Graduate School (delineated in the Graduate Catalog), all candidates are expected to demonstrate skills sufficient to provide psychological and educational services to children, families, and schools. Progress in the Program is a result of successful completion of university coursework *and* the demonstration of important characteristics and dispositions identified below as Fitness to Practice Standards. These Standards are guided by the School Psychology Program Principles, which are based on the profession's values and reflect goals for those graduating from the Program. The Fitness to Practice Standards are especially critical given the nature of the services provided by school psychologists, and program faculty reserve the right to recommend or not recommend students' continuation in the Program on the basis of whether students demonstrate Fitness to Practice as outlined below.

### **School Psychology Program Principles**

Three principles represent core values demonstrated across all levels of school psychology, and guide every aspect of the UTRGV School Psychology Program. Implied with each is the expectation that students will embrace a rigorous and closely monitored academic plan necessary to acquire requisite skills that will be used in providing professional services to diverse schools, communities, individuals, and families. The values of human rights, respect, dignity, and integrity are clearly mandated by all those associated with this program.

Principle A: Cultural and Individual Dignity

Principle B: Commitment to Self-Reflection

Principle C: Honesty and Integrity

**Principle A: Cultural and Individual Dignity:** Students must maintain an active cultural self-awareness in serving diverse communities and individuals. Personal self-awareness of values and beliefs is an important disposition that facilitates working with other group values, cultures, mores, and experiences. Students should be able to demonstrate appreciation and respect of persons of different cultural, racial, and/or individual differences. Student efforts to understand underrepresented communities are important components of all professional contacts.

**Principle B: Commitment to Self-Reflection:** All students are expected to be self-regulated learners. Thus, the principle of self-reflection involves deliberate self-monitoring and self-regulatory management in order to reflect on skill development, academic progress, and professional strengths and weaknesses. Students should set personal goals on a regular basis and then monitor progress towards goal attainment so that professional behaviors can be adjusted as necessary.

**Principle C: Honesty and Integrity:** Students will demonstrate honesty and integrity in all areas of their professional development. These behaviors will be observable in how the students prepare and complete assignments, maintain themselves in relationship to all professional and informal contacts, and how they operate in consultation settings. Students will also be expected to demonstrate how they respond to potentially challenging situations and ethical dilemmas.

### **Fitness to Practice Standards**

In addition to all curriculum requirements (including taking advanced coursework, enrolling in practicum and internship, and applying to take the comprehensive examination) students must meet the following standards in order to progress through the School Psychology Program:

**Academic Excellence:** Maintenance of scholastic performance meeting or exceeding UTRGV and department standards.

Academic standards include:

- Attendance of all classes; preparedness and punctuality are the expected norm.
- Completion of all course assignments in a professional and timely manner.
- Demonstration of academic integrity (i.e., refraining from dishonest behaviors such as cheating and plagiarism).
- Demonstration of written and oral communication skills necessary to convey their ideas within both academic (e.g., in the classroom, during supervision) and professional (e.g., with children, parents, and school personnel) contexts. Written communication includes the ability to write clearly, use correct grammar and spelling, and convey ideas to a range of audiences in a way that facilitates understanding. Oral communication includes the ability to communicate effectively with other students, faculty, staff, and professionals by expressing ideas and feelings clearly and demonstrating a willingness and an ability to listen to others. This also includes the professional level skills in spoken English required to understand content presented in the program, to adequately complete all oral assignments, and to meet the objectives of field placement experiences, as specified by faculty.

**Acquisition and Application of Skills:** Demonstration of the acquisition of, *and ability to apply*, skills necessary to work effectively with persons and systems having diverse needs. This standard will be evaluated throughout the curriculum, but will be most directly observed in Practicum in School Psychology and Internship in School Psychology. Both university faculty and site-based supervisors will ensure that students demonstrate the skills necessary to work as practitioners of school psychology.

These skills include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Psychoeducational assessment and diagnosis
- Individual and group counseling
- Consultation with teachers, parents, and other professionals
- Crisis intervention
- Ethical decision making
- In-service training

**Professionalism:** Demonstration of professionalism in interactions with others. This standard will be evaluated throughout the curriculum as the student's interactions with classmates, faculty, clients, and supervisors are monitored.

Students must demonstrate:

- Flexibility and openness to new perspectives and ways of thinking.
- Acceptance and openness to professional feedback and constructive coaching.
- The ability to separate personal and professional issues when working with clients and when completing coursework.
- The ability to build effective professional relationships with children and parents/families.
- The ability to work collegially and productively with classmates, university faculty and staff, and school personnel at field-based sites.
- Appropriate social skills in professional and social interactions with faculty, colleagues, and clients.
- Skills in working with culturally diverse populations.
- Behaviors that would preclude any risk of sexual harassment, verbal and physical aggression, and sexual relationships with clients, supervisors, and faculty.
- The ability to maintain a professional appearance when in professional contexts (e.g., field-based experiences).

**Emotional and Mental Fitness:** Demonstration of emotional and mental fitness in their interactions with others, and in completing curricular requirements. This standard will be evaluated throughout the curriculum as the student's interactions with classmates, faculty, clients, and supervisors are monitored.

Student emotional and mental fitness are demonstrated through the following behaviors:

- Ability to deal with current life stressors through the use of appropriate coping mechanisms. He or she will handle stress effectively by using appropriate self-care and developing supportive relationships with colleagues, peers, and others.
- Demonstration of the judgment, emotional health, and mental health required to function effectively as a school psychologist.
- Ability to think analytically about professional and scholarly issues.
- Ability to self-reflect on their own learning and professional practice and competence.

**Ethical Standards:** Students will conform to the codes of ethics of relevant professional associations in psychology (e.g., National Association of School Psychologists, American Psychological Association) in addition to the ethical and legal regulations relevant to the practice of psychology in the State of Texas (e.g., Texas Administrative Code, Rules and Regulations of the Texas State Board of Examiners of Psychologists; <http://www.tsbep.state.tx.us/>).

Examples of student ethical behaviors include the following:

- Maintenance of confidential information concerning clients unless disclosure serves professional purposes or is required by law.
- Demonstration of self-awareness and management of the limits of their own competence.
- Adherence to informed consent procedures prior to providing professional services.
- Maintenance of test security of all assessment-related materials.
- Adherence to clients' right to privacy, and requirements associated with the storage of all client records (in a secure location).
- Commitment to seek supervision when faced with ethical dilemmas or difficult situations.

It is the duty of faculty members in the School Psychology Program to evaluate all students according to these standards in all settings in which faculty members and students interact, including classes, practicum and internship sites, advising, and supervision. It is expected that students will respond to reviews, formal or informal, in appropriate ways and will attempt to conform to professional standards as explained to them.

**Admission to the Program does not guarantee fitness to remain in the program to completion.** Only those students who meet program standards will be allowed to continue in the program. If and when a student is judged not to meet program standards sufficiently to be allowed to provide psychological services to others, that student will be removed from continuation in the program.

### **Fitness to Practice Review (FPR) Procedures**

Faculty members, staff, advisors, and field supervisors (Evaluators) will evaluate students according to the standards outlined above. All faculty members may have some input into student performance or conduct.

Students may be evaluated using the Fitness to Practice Review Form at any time during their program if and when, in the opinion of one or more Evaluators, significant deviations from the Standards have occurred. All students referred for review are expected to participate in the process. Refusal to participate will not terminate the process. The level of review will depend on factors such as the nature, severity, and frequency of the incident or concern. For example, repeated violations may result in immediate Formal Level 2 Review. Violations of the UTRGV or field-based site's code of conduct will result in immediate Formal Level 2 Review.

### **Levels of Review**

#### **1. Informal Review**

An informal review involves a faculty member and a student. When a faculty member has concerns about a student meeting any of the Fitness to Practice criteria, the faculty member may take any or all of the following steps as necessary:

- a. Discuss the concerns directly with the student and seek to work with the student to resolve the difficulties.

- b. Advise the Department Chair and the student's Advisor of the concern(s) in order to identify potential patterns and issues related to the student.
- c. Document dates and content of meetings with students using the Fitness to Practice Review Form, and provide a copy of the signed form to the Graduate Advisor of Record for documentation purposes.
- d. If a problem arises at a field-based site, the site supervisor may discuss concerns directly with the UTRGV faculty member. The student may also be included in this meeting.

## 2. Formal Review: Level 1

When a faculty member or supervisor is sufficiently concerned about a student's Fitness to Practice, he or she will fill out the Fitness to Practice Review Form. These forms are to be turned in to the student's Advisor, the Graduate Advisor of Record, and the Department Chair. A conference will then be scheduled with the instructor/supervisor, the student, the student's Advisor, the Graduate Advisor of Record, and the Department Chair. When possible, the conference will be mediated by a departmental faculty member who has not had the student in class. During this conference, a plan for remediation will be developed. The nature and content of the plan will depend on the specific situation. The remediation plan will include a reasonable timeline for the student to demonstrate adequate progress, and will be signed by all parties involved. The remediation plan may continue for more than one semester, depending on the individual circumstances. If the student fails to implement the remediation plan(s) satisfactorily, he/she will be placed on Formal Level 2 Review.

## 3. Formal Review: Level 2

If a second incident or concern is reported on the same student, the student has failed a remediation plan during the Level 1 Review, or the seriousness of the incident or concern warrants it, the Fitness to Practice Committee will be convened. This group (made up of at least one School Psychology faculty member, at least one additional faculty member from the Department of Human Development and School Services, the Graduate Advisor of Record, and chaired by the Department Chair) will meet to:

- a. Review the paperwork,
- b. Interview the faculty members who instructed the student,
- c. Interview the student,
- d. Make a determination regarding the student's suitability to continue in the program.

### **Appeals and Procedures Subsequent to Request for Withdrawal**

Following the review of information at the Fitness to Practice Committee meeting, the Committee must make a decision and report to the student and the Graduate Advisor of Record that the student: (1) should be allowed to remain in the program with conditions/without conditions or (2) should be removed from the program, immediately dropped from enrollment in current courses, and prevented from enrolling in subsequent courses.

If the decision is to allow the student to remain in the program, the Committee may place remedial conditions (a corrective plan) on the student's continuing in the program, may set time limits for meeting the conditions, or may make other recommendations.

If the student is dissatisfied with the decision of the Fitness to Practice Committee, he or she may appeal to the Office of the Dean of the College of Education & P16 Integration by submitting a written appeal to the Dean's office. This appeal must be submitted within 10 working days after receiving the decision from the Fitness to Practice Committee. The Dean (or Dean's designee) will consider the matter, and based on information submitted by the Fitness to Practice Committee, the Dean (or Dean's designee) may meet with the Fitness to Practice Committee and/or with the student. After gathering and reviewing all information, the Dean (or Dean's designee) will communicate his/her decision to the student in writing. The final decision will be either continuation in the program (with conditions) or dismissal from the program. The decision of the Dean (or Dean's designee) will be final.