

Master of Science in Mental Health and Substance Use Counseling

Department of Behavioral Sciences and Criminal Justice Chair: Dr. Krystal St. Peter

Master of Science in Mental Health and Substance Use Counseling Program Coordinator: Professor Jareb Kinney

Overview

The Master of Science in Mental Health and Substance Use Counseling program (Pending HLC approval) prepares students for state licensure as professional mental health counselors and addiction counselors in North Dakota (applicants seeking licensure outside North Dakota should consult their respective state licensing boards for specific requirements).

Graduate students complete a rigorous three-year curriculum designed to develop competent, ethical, and culturally responsive professional counselors. The program integrates comprehensive academic preparation with structured clinical training experiences.

During the second year of the program, students will select one of two clinical training pathways. Students may complete a 700-hour clinical training experience in either Clinical Mental Health Counseling or Addiction Counseling. Alternatively, students may elect to complete an extended advanced clinical training experience totaling 1,400 hours, which includes 700 hours in Clinical Mental Health Counseling and 700 hours in Addiction Counseling.

Completion of the extended advanced clinical experience prepares graduates to apply for dual licensure as both professional mental health counselors and addiction counselors in accordance with North Dakota state board requirements.

The program emphasizes integrated training in both mental health and substance use counseling, with focused attention treating diverse populations, co-occurring disorders, prevention, advocacy, and recovery support. Coursework, experiential training, and supervised clinical experiences prepare students to work effectively in community mental health centers, substance use treatment facilities, integrated care settings, private practice, and other behavioral health environments.

The program aligns with North Dakota state licensure standards for professional counselors and addiction counselors and integrates professional preparation consistent with CACREP and National Addiction Studies Accreditation Commission (NASAC) standards.

Program Philosophy

The mission of the Master of Science in Mental Health and Substance Use Counseling program is to prepare ethical, competent, and compassionate professional counselors who integrate knowledge, clinical skill, and reflective decision-making while treating diverse individuals, families, and communities affected by mental health and addiction.

The program is grounded in a Practitioner–Scholar framework that emphasizes the developmental integration of research, theory, and supervised clinical training. Through progressive coursework and sequenced residency, practicum and internship experiences, students learn to apply empirical knowledge through reflective and research-informed clinical decision-making. Graduates are prepared to implement evidence-based interventions, evaluate outcomes, engage in lifelong professional growth, and contribute to the counseling profession through ethical treatment, leadership, and advocacy.

The conceptual foundation of the program emphasizes:

- Ethical and Professional Accountability
- Developmental and Reflective Professional Growth
- Cultural Humility and Equity-Responsive Practice
- Research-Informed Clinical Decision-Making
- Advocacy and Leadership in Prevention and Recovery-Oriented Systems

Academic preparation is aligned with state licensure standards and national accreditation standards. Students are trained to engage in reflective practice, integrate empirical research with clinical judgment, and make sound ethical decisions in the treatment of individuals with mental health, addiction, or co-occurring disorders.

Admission Requirements

For admission to the Master of Science in Mental Health and Substance Use Counseling program, applicants must meet the following criteria:

Educational Background

- Applicants must hold an earned four-year bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited college or university.
- The bachelor's degree must consist of a minimum of 120 semester credit hours, or the equivalent if based on a quarter-credit system.

Academic Performance

- A minimum GPA of 3.0 for the applicant's undergraduate study.

Foundational Coursework

- Applicants should have successfully completed at least 18 semester credit hours in social or behavioral sciences (e.g., psychology, sociology, social work, human development, or addiction studies), each with a grade of "C" or higher.
- In addition, applicants must have completed and earned a grade of "C" or higher in specific undergraduate courses, including:
 - Statistics
 - Abnormal Psychology, or Psychopathology, or Psychological Disorders (or equivalent)

Application Materials

- **Statement of Purpose:** A written statement describing the applicant's professional goals, personal motivations, and reasons for pursuing graduate study in counseling.
- **Résumé or Curriculum Vitae:** Detailing educational background, professional experience, and relevant volunteer or community engagement.
- **Reflective Response Questions:** Applicants will respond to program-provided prompts to demonstrate self-awareness, critical thinking, and readiness for graduate-level training.
- **Completed/ Passed Background Check**

Interview Process

- Selected applicants will be invited to participate in either an in-person or virtual interview, according to their preference, with the Director of the Counseling Program, the Chair of the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Criminal Justice, and additional program faculty.
- The interview provides an opportunity for faculty to assess the applicant's professional readiness, interpersonal skills, and alignment with the program's mission and values.

***Full offering of this degree program is contingent on final accreditation approval by HLC, expected in Spring 2026.

Required Courses

MHA 510	Introduction to the Counseling Profession	3
MHA 511	Human Growth and Development	3
MHA 512	Counseling Theories	3
MHA 513	Substance Use Survey Course	3
MHA 514	Ethics in Counseling	3
MHA 515	Research, Statistics, and Program Evaluation	5
MHA 516	Appraisal and Assessment in Treatment	3
MHA 517	Multicultural Diversity	3
MHA 518	Counseling Methods	4
MHA 519	Psychopharmacology	3

MHA 520	Diagnosis and Treatment of Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders	3
MHA 521	Career Counseling	1
MHA 522	Supervision	1
MHA 523	Clinical Care in Underserved and Marginalized Communities	3
MHA 524	Family Counseling	3
MHA 525	Treatment Planning for Mental Health and Substance Use Counseling	1
MHA 526	Group Counseling	4
MHA 527	Practicum	3
MHA 594	Internship I	8

Additional Optional Coursework:

MHA 596	Internship II	
MHA 599	Thesis	

Total Hours		60
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