



Heritage University

Graduate Studies in Psychology

Student Handbook for

Master of Arts in Mental Health Counseling (MMHC) Program

2024-2025

Land Acknowledgement

Heritage University occupies its home on the traditional lands of the Yakama People. These ancestral homelands are the Yakama, Palouse, Pisuouse, Wenatshapam, Klikatat, Klinquit, Kow-was-say-ee, Li-ay-was, Skin-pah, Wish-ham, Shyiks, Ochechotes, Kah-milt-pa, and Se-ap-cat, who today are represented by the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation [TREATY OF 1855] and, whose relationship with this land continues to this day. Heritage University, grounded in the vision of the two Yakama women founders, respects Indigenous peoples as traditional guardians of the lands and the enduring relationship that exists between Indigenous peoples and their traditional territories. We offer gratitude for the land itself, for those who have stewarded it for generations, and for the opportunity to study, learn, work, and be in community on this land. We acknowledge that our university's history, like many others, is fundamentally tied to the first colonial developments in the Yakima Valley. Finally, we respectfully acknowledge and honor past, present, and future Indigenous students who will journey through this home called Heritage University.

Note: The contents of this handbook are subject to change. Please consult with your advisor for the most current information about your program of study.

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Statement of Purpose

Heritage University's Master of Arts in Mental Health Counseling (MMHC) prepares you for a rewarding career helping individuals struggling with mental illness, addiction, and substance use. The program is particularly geared towards preparing graduates to work as mental health counselors in the K-12 school system. However, graduates can go on to work as mental health counselors in a wide array of fields.

The employment outlook for mental health counselors is strong, particularly in the education arena. As K-12 school districts struggle to serve children with complex emotional and behavioral needs, school-based mental health counselors have become integral to the education team. They play a critical role in supporting children so they can overcome barriers that get in the way of their academic success. Plus, they help elevate key markers for school success. Schools with mental health counselors show improvements across the board—better attendance rates; lower rates of suspension, expulsion, and other disciplinary actions; improved academic achievement; and improved graduation rates.

The Student Handbook for Heritage University's MMHC program has been developed as a guide to assist graduate students in successfully completing coursework and program requirements for entry into the helping professions as Licensed Mental Health Clinicians. Students are responsible for the information contained in the University's catalog and this student handbook. Key information is provided in these two documents. Specifically, you will find information pertaining to program procedures guided by the ethics of the Mental Health Counselor profession.

Accreditation Status

Heritage University is accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, the institutional accrediting body in the Northwest. Heritage University has formal authority from the state of Washington to offer undergraduate and graduate education programs through the master's degree under Washington Student Achievement Council Approval Section 3675, Chapter 36, Title 38, U.S. Code (Eligibility Requirement 2).

Program Accreditation and Licensure Information

The MMHC program is designed to align with CACREP (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs) standards but is not yet CACREP accredited. Upon graduation, students will be eligible for licensure in Washington State as Licensed Mental Health Counselor Associates (LMHCA). Students considering licensure in other states should carefully review each state's specific licensing requirements.

Important Caveats:

1. **State Licensing Requirements:** Licensure requirements vary by state. Students planning to practice outside of Washington should ensure they meet the licensing requirements of the state in which they intend to practice.
2. **Interstate Counseling Compact:** The upcoming Counseling Compact will allow licensed counselors to practice across state lines in participating states without needing additional licenses. However, participation in the Compact requires that:
 - The student's home state (the state they reside in) must be a member of the Compact.
 - The student must hold a license in their home state.
3. For example, if a student moves from Washington to Oregon, they must obtain an Oregon license to participate in the Compact, as residing in Oregon with only a Washington license will not permit them to practice in Oregon.

Note: It is anticipated that CACREP accreditation may be achieved by the time students apply for their full licensure, though this cannot be guaranteed. Additionally, while the Counseling Compact is expected to provide greater flexibility for licensed counselors, its implementation timeline and participating states are still developing, so students should stay informed about these changes.

Students of the MMHC Program

Heritage University welcomes all applicants without regards to religious affiliation, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. The program has a particular emphasis on training individuals from the Yakima valley, and surrounding area, as a way to “grow our own” communities into licensed mental health providers.

Faculty of the MMHC Program

Heritage University uses a combination of full time and adjunct faculty to teach the courses needed to meet the program mission, goals, and student learning. Core faculty are clinical practitioners specially trained in working with children, adults, and families from a culturally informed, holistic perspective. Faculty have a wide array of licenses/degrees, including licensed psychologists, counselor educators, and licensed mental health practitioners. Full time faculty members are engaged in supervision, shared governance, and research in fields of study related to mental health counseling. Adjunct faculty come to us from an array of disciplines, often work full time in the field, and bring with them their special expertise.

See Faculty Bios in the Appendix for more information about Core MMHC Faculty.

Program Mission

The Heritage University Master's in Mental Health Counseling program mission is to develop ethically competent licensed mental health counselors (LMHCs) who work collaboratively within K-12 contexts and other community based settings to meet the mental health needs of children, adolescents, and adults in the greater Yakima valley and beyond. Students who successfully complete the program will have specialized experience working with individuals and families in rural settings.

Program Objectives

Course offerings and curriculum align with the requirements set by the Washington State Department of Health to apply to be a Licensed Mental Health Counselor Associate (LMHC-A) upon successful completion of the program.

- Students understand, identify, and develop strategies for working with clients at different developmental stages, including understanding how addiction, trauma and developmental concerns impact the client and process of human growth and development.
- Students understand the impact of culture, including their own, on the counseling process and are able to act within the expectations of multicultural and social justice competencies.

- Students understand group counseling dynamics and are able to facilitate various types of groups using appropriate and relevant group facilitation skills to create transformational experiences for clients.
- Students intentionally, creatively and effectively use essential counseling and interviewing skills in working with clients from various cultures and backgrounds.
- Students are able to incorporate theoretical understanding into work with clients, including using techniques and interventions, conceptualization and developing a personal understanding of their own theoretical approach.
- Students understand the assessment process in counseling and intentionally and effectively utilize appropriate assessments for a variety of reasons across a variety of settings, particularly within community mental health and educational contexts.
- Students are effective consumers of research and understand how to intentionally apply research to the counseling process

Degree and Program Options

Heritage University offers a Master's of Arts degree in Mental Health Counseling, a 60 credit, CACREP-aligned program. As a part of this program, students will have the option to tailor their elective credits and complete the requirements for the Substance Use Professional Trainee requirements as outlined by the Department of Health in Washington State: <https://doh.wa.gov/licenses-permits-and-certificates/professions-new-renew-or-update/substance-use-disorder-professional/certification-requirements>. Students also have the option to apply for/complete a Spanish Language Certification if they are interested in doing clinical work in Spanish.

Additional program benefits include:

- Washington State Licensed Mental Health Counselor Associate eligible program.
- Complete your degree in two years (six semesters).
- Classes asynchronous online and in-person on Friday afternoons.
- Program emphasis on mental health services in K-12 schools in the greater Yakima valley.

Admissions

Heritage University empowers a multi-cultural and inclusive student body to overcome the social, cultural, economic and geographic barriers that limit access to higher education. Rooted in the homeland of the Yakama Nation, we embrace transformational student-centered education that cultivates leadership and a commitment to the promotion of a more just society. Heritage University is both a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) and Native American Serving Non Tribal Institution (NASNTI), one of the few universities and colleges to hold both designations. As such, many of our students are from the area and have a desire to serve both of these communities that are so integral to our foundations.

The Psychology Department at Heritage University is deeply committed to creating a diverse community of practitioner scholars equipped to serve the greater Yakima valley and the pacific northwest. Individuals whose professional interests and lived experiences reflect that population of our valley are especially encouraged to apply. Finally, the MMHC program was built in collaboration with ESD 105, and is currently funded through the U.S. Department of Education. Students interested in working within K-12 school contexts, and community based settings are especially of interest to our department at this time.

Application Requirements

To qualify for the MA in Mental Health Counseling program, you will need to have earned a Bachelor's degree by the time your first semester begins. We encourage students to have at least one class in Research Methods and Mental Illness (or Abnormal/Developmental Psychology) prior to beginning the program, though the Psychology Department at Heritage University can work with students if that is missing from their background. To apply, students will need to submit the following:

- unofficial transcripts,
- several brief personal statements information for two professional letter of recommendation writers
- curriculum vitae/resume

Note: At this time, Psychology faculty who also teach in the undergraduate program (Dr. Amy Nusbaum and Dr. Kayden Vargas) are unable to serve as letter writers for applicants due to conflicts of interest.

Contrary to other master's programs in the state, the MMHC program at Heritage University does not have minimum GPA requirements nor do we require that you take the Graduate Record Exam, commonly known as the GRE. These choices are intentional, as research has consistently demonstrated that metrics of GPA and GRE scores are not accurate predictors of graduate school success (Nelson & Nelson, 1995), especially for students of color, first generation college students, and students from rural settings. Instead, the admissions team for the MMHC program is committed to finding and admitting students who (1) have a Bachelor's degree from an accredited institution (2) possess personal lived experiences and/or professional experiences that will equip them to succeed in the helping professions, and (3) have a deep desire to serve the greater Yakima valley in school based and/or community based mental health settings. It is much more important to us that we find students who align with the heart and mission of the program.

Admission into the program is based on the successful completion of a three part process:

- (1) Students will be asked to submit their unofficial transcripts, brief personal statements, and information for 2 letters of recommendation. Each year, there will be a priority deadline in early to mid December. Applications received after the priority deadline each year will be accepted on a rolling basis, until all slots for any given cohort are filled.
- (2) After initial screening by the admissions committee, a select group of applicants will be invited to participate in an interview process, which will occur over zoom.
- (3) After interviews, an estimated 18-23 applicants will be extended offers of admission and given a general timeline for how and when to respond.
- (4) A small number of individuals may be extended a waitlist notification, and will be notified on a rolling basis if any slots in the MMHC program are open to them.

Denial of Admission to the MMHC Program

The MMHC program is competitive for admissions, with a limited number of slots per cohort. Students who apply to Heritage University's MMHC program and complete all prerequisites for consideration will receive a letter from the Psychology Department notifying them of the Admission Committee's decision.

For students who wish to challenge the committee's decision, a process has been established to review student concerns. Students are directed to begin at the first level of the process and progress to the next level only in the event that they feel their concerns have not been adequately met. The steps are as follows:

1. Submit a written request to the Program Director or Department Chair asking for reconsideration of their denial. That request should include information not available to the program admissions committee at the time of the interview.
2. Following reconsideration, if the student continues to be denied admission and wishes to further challenge the committee's decision, they should contact the Provost, and if deemed necessary, a meeting with the provost, Program Director, and Department chair will be held. The decision in this meeting is final.

Professional Expectations of Students

The MMHC Program, along with its faculty, supports the highest level of professionalism as set forth by best practices in the field as well as the ethical standards of the American Counseling Association and Heritage University standards for academic honesty and student conduct. The program expects each student to be knowledgeable of these standards and to act in accordance with them. Beyond written standards set forth by related professional organizations, professionalism embraces a high standard for dispositions and interpersonal interaction that includes respect for people, processes, and property. The faculty expect prospective therapists to engage in behavior that reflects a high level of health and integrity. Students should possess effective interpersonal skills, a genuine concern for others, and an active commitment to personal growth and professional development, as well as a desire to promote a just and equitable society. Similarly, attitudes that discriminate against marginalized groups in any way will not be tolerated, and hate speech has no room in the program and is an adequate reason for dismissal from the program at any time. Hate speech is defined by the United Nations as “any kind of communication in speech, writing, or behavior, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, color descent, gender, or other identity factor.

Students are expected to familiarize themselves with the ACA Code of Ethics prior to beginning their program of study. See Appendix C as well as the Code linked here: https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/ethics/2014-aca-code-of-ethics.pdf?sfvrsn=55ab73d0_1

Personal Counseling Recommendation

Although not required, students in the MMHC program are encouraged to engage in personal therapy or counseling with a licensed mental health professional. Personal counseling is beneficial for a few reasons. First, it allows MMHC students to experience what it is like to be a client, which is invaluable in empathizing and providing competent care to clients seen by MMHC graduates in the future. Second, MMHC coursework and the process of counselor development often brings up thoughts, feelings, and memories that students may want to explore and process in personal counseling. We believe that competent counselors have experienced what it is like to receive competent counseling.

Faculty recognize that it is difficult to establish care with therapists in our rural area for a variety of reasons, including access, cost, and finding the right fit therapist. Students can search for a personal therapist or counselor through the following directories:

PsychologyToday.com: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us>

TherapyDen.com: <https://www.therapyden.com/>

Open Path Collective: <https://openpathcollective.org/>

In addition to these directories, faculty have relationships with other counseling practices that are willing to provide sliding scale, telehealth support for students. Please consult with faculty to discuss the process of how to get in contact with these counselors.

Some faculty maintain private practices in addition to their faculty responsibilities. Faculty are not able to provide personal counseling to students in the MMHC program. According to the ACA and APA Code of Ethics, supervisors are not to provide counseling to supervisees, as this would be a conflict of interest and a dual relationship.

Should students wish to find a personal counselor and are having difficulty doing so, or would like more personalized support, faculty members are willing to support students in finding a referral. Faculty recognize that other extenuating circumstances could be also impacting students and their academic work. Students are encouraged to reach out to faculty advisors should they need support finding other resources in addition to personal counseling (e.g., undocumented/DACAmented support, housing/food insecurity, custody litigations, etc.)

Faculty Responsibilities

In addition to general legal and ethical parameters that guide the behavior of practitioners, therapist trainers and supervisors are further bound by the ethical guidelines of the American Counseling Association (ACA) and the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES). Five areas of responsibility are outlined below. This information is provided to assist students in understanding the policies and procedures adhered to by Heritage University's MMHC program with regard to student remediation, retention, and due process.

1. Faculty have an ethical responsibility to accept only those students who meet entry-level requirements for admission into the training program or applied therapy setting.
2. Faculty are responsible for assessing each student's skills and experience and should choose for the student only those activities that are commensurate with the student's assessed level of competence.
3. When it has been determined that deficits exist that impede the student's professional functioning, faculty members have the responsibility to recommend remedial assistance. If the area of concern centers on personal understanding and problem resolution, faculty may recommend participation in activities designed to facilitate personal growth.
4. Should faculty concerns not be adequately addressed, faculty have the responsibility of screening from the program, applied therapy setting, or state licensure or certification of those students unable to provide competent and ethical professional services.
5. Faculty have the responsibility of providing the student with information concerning due process.

Role of Faculty Versus Supervisors

The role of classroom faculty is to teach content that is critical to the professional development of the student. Classroom faculty also refine therapy skills in the classroom that will later be used in clinical settings. Classroom faculty assign grades based on student performance.

The supervisor role is to refine and expand therapy skills taught in the classroom. The supervisor helps student therapists conceptualize and plan therapy strategies from multiple perspectives, and to broaden student areas of competency. There is an

evaluative role in the supervision that assesses skill competencies throughout the clinical experience, but that evaluative role does not result in assigned grades for a class. Supervisors have a primary role of ensuring that student therapists provide services in a manner that is safe, effective, and ethical, while mentoring the student therapist towards independent practice.

Student Advising

Under the direction of your faculty advisor, you will:

1. Receive pre-registration advising and develop a degree plan that may include directives from the MMHC Core team. This comprehensive degree plan, if followed, will lead to the degree sought.
2. Review progress toward professional goals and degree, revising your study plan accordingly.
3. Receive information with regard to program procedures.
4. Be informed of new state requirements made after the comprehensive degree plan that may result in modifications to that plan.

It is important that you share your goals with your faculty advisor. If you want to complete Spanish Certification or coursework related to becoming an SUDPT, it is important that you communicate this to your faculty advisor so that an appropriate course plan can be developed. Please note: It is the student's responsibility to stay in close contact with their advisor, keeping them abreast of any changes in student record information (i.e., address, phone number) and updating alterations made to the study plan.

Example schedule:

Year 1 Fall	Year 1 Spring	Year 1 Summer
Introduction to Counseling and Professional Identity (3)	Group Counseling (3)	Trauma Informed Counseling (3)
Counseling Skills (3)	Professional, Legal, and Ethical Issues in Counseling (3)	Child and Adolescent Counseling (3)
Human Growth and Development Across the Lifespan (3)	Diagnosis and Assessment (3)	Counseling Theory and Techniques (3)
Family Systems (3)	Multicultural Competence in Counseling (3)	
Year 2 Fall	Year 2 Spring	Year 2 Summer
Addictions (3)	College and Career Counseling (2)	Elective Choice (3)
Consultation and Supervision (1)	Research Methods and Evaluation (3)	Internship (2)
Elective Choice (3)	Evidence Informed Practice (3)	
Practicum (2) Internship I (2)	Internship II (2)	

Academic Standing & Satisfactory Academic Progress

It is an MMHC program requirement that students maintain good academic standing. At the graduate level, this is defined as maintaining a 3.0 GPA, and adequate completion of course credits each semester.

If a student is a financial aid recipient, they are responsible to know there are limits to your eligibility to receive financial aid. Schools are required to review your academic progress — measured by cumulative GPA and the rate at which a student is completing their classes. There are also maximum lifetime (aggregate) limits to how much Pell Grant and Stafford Loan you can receive, and a limit to the number of credits for which you are eligible for aid.

Students are reviewed for Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) where their GPA, the number of classes a student withdraws from or fails, and the total number of attempted credits are reviewed against specific standards. Students must meet these standards to remain eligible for financial aid, and to remain in good standing with the academic program.

Students can read more about Academic Standing protocol for graduate students at the following link: <https://heritage.edu/student-resources/financial-aid/satisfactoryacademicprogress/>

Heritage University is committed to providing students the tools to succeed in their academic programs. Students struggling academically, emotionally, or relationally are highly encouraged to meet with their advisor or the Program Director to develop a retention plan to ameliorate issues impairing success in the program. This retention plan will be documented in the student's department record.

Course Completion and Program Progression

If students are unable to complete a course due to academic or personal reasons (e.g., health issues, family emergencies), they should consult with their faculty advisor to determine the best course of action. Several foundational courses must be completed before beginning practicum or internship, including Counseling Skills, Group Counseling, Multicultural Competence in Counseling, and Professional, Legal, and Ethical Issues.

Failure to complete these required courses may delay the start of a student's clinical experience, potentially extending their time in the program beyond two years.

Students who anticipate difficulties in passing or completing a course due to personal circumstances are strongly encouraged to discuss their concerns with both their instructor and faculty advisor as early as possible. Faculty are dedicated to supporting students' individual needs while ensuring that all necessary competency standards are met for clinical practice.

Academic Grievance Process

Students who feel that an academic decision affecting them should be re-examined may present their case according to the following grievance process. These steps are followed until the concern is resolved:

1. A student confers with the instructor concerned.
2. If the student believes the matter has not been satisfactorily resolved, the student confers with the department chair or department director.
3. If the student believes the matter has not been satisfactorily resolved, the student confers with the college dean to seek assistance in resolving the concern.
4. A student makes an appointment with the provost/vice president of Academic Affairs to seek assistance in resolving the concern.
5. The student and the provost/vice president of Academic Affairs may request a hearing committee to review the matter.
6. The provost/vice president of Academic Affairs communicates the decision to the concerned student.

The grievance procedure is explained in the student handbook, which is available in the Student Services Center. Students can read more about due process at the following webpage:

http://catalog.heritage.edu/content.php?catoid=10&navoid=821#academic_grievance_process

Academic Honesty

Just as the faculty, staff, and administration at Heritage University strive to be forthright, direct and honest, and to value integrity in all their dealings, the university expects all students to function in a similar manner. Students are expected to adhere to the highest standards of academic honesty and to refrain from any dishonest or unethical action. In all academic exercises, examinations, papers, and reports, students are expected to submit their own work. They are also expected to refrain from assisting other students in work that is expected to be their own work.

The use of the words or ideas of others is always to be indicated through an acceptable form of citation. This policy will be specified in the syllabus for each course.

Definition of plagiarism: Plagiarism occurs whenever a person attempts to pass off as his or her own work, either verbally or in writing, the words and ideas of others. Plagiarism most often occurs in projects that require independent preparation (outside of class); although it can occur in essay examinations, this is not generally the case. Plagiarism can be either inadvertent (a failure to understand the responsibility for acknowledgment or the means by which acknowledgment should be made) or willful (with a conscious intent to deceive).

Please consult the Heritage University Catalog for current procedures related to academic dishonesty: chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://heritage.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/HU_Student-Journey-ACADEMIC-HONESTY-V10.pdf

A note on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI): MMHC faculty understand that the use of AI to assist in academic and professional work is rapidly increasing. Due to the continuously changing nature of AI, faculty take the use of it to complete tasks and assignments seriously and cautiously. At present, there are significant ethical concerns in the mental health field regarding AI, specifically regarding its ability to protect confidentiality and to produce work that is of sound clinical judgment. There are also significant concerns about plagiarism and what students are able to learn should they rely heavily on AI. If you have questions about whether or not AI is appropriate for an assignment, please discuss it with your advisor and faculty members.

Academic Accommodations

Do you need accommodations to assist with your learning? The MMHC Program committed to providing assistance to help you be successful in this course. For information about student disability services on campus, please visit the Office of Disability Services (ADA) | Heritage University webpage; or email Officeofdisabilityservices@heritage.edu

Academic Support

Graduate level training and coursework is challenging and expectations for assignments and writing are high. **Students will be offered a mandatory writing workshop at the beginning of their coursework in order to refresh their knowledge of APA style and formatting.** Almost all courses in the program will require an APA style for writing. In addition to faculty support, students can access the Academic Skills Center at Heritage by making an online or in-person appointment should they need assistance with their writing: <https://www.heritage.edu/student-resources/academic-skills-center/>

Technology Requirements

In order to satisfactorily complete coursework and program requirements, students will need to have access to a computer/laptop with a camera and microphone access. Assignments and coursework will be administered through MyHeritage- an online platform that requires internet access to utilize.

Overview of Practicum and Internship Experiences

Early planning for practicum and internship experiences is extremely important. Clinical training will span a minimum of three semesters and be divided into two parts: (1) Practicum and (2) Internship. It is through practicum and internship experiences that students gain the clinical experiences required for licensure as a Licensed Mental Health Counselor Associate (LMHCA) in the state of Washington. As a CACREP-aligned program, the MMHC program follows the practicum and internship guidelines put forth by CACREP as standards of clinical practice. The practicum experience represents students' first semester of clinical work at their sites, typically during the Fall

semester of the second year. The internship experience begins during the Fall semester of the second year and into the second and third semesters that complete the academic year. CACREP standards stipulate that the practicum experience in that Fall semester meet the following standards:

Students complete supervised counseling practicum experiences that total a minimum of **100 clock hours** (Fall semester, year 2 of the program):

- Practicum students complete at least **40 clock hours of direct service** with actual clients that contributes to the development of counseling skills.
- Practicum students have **weekly interaction with supervisors** that averages **one hour per week of individual supervision** throughout the practicum by a qualified mental health professional each week.
- Practicum students participate in an average of **1 1/2 hours per week of group supervision** on a regular schedule throughout the practicum facilitated by a qualified mental health professional. This often includes on-site group supervision, as well as the “practicum” class that MMHC students will be enrolled in throughout their field experiences.

In counseling, a **direct service hour is a face-to-face interaction between a counselor and a client** where both parties are in the same room (or via telehealth) for most of the hour, approximately **45-50 minutes**. **Direct service hours** can include activities that help clients develop new skills, insights, or behaviors, or address service plan goals. They can also include guiding clients, such as parents, guardians, or teachers, to help them respond more effectively. It also can include psychoeducation.

Examples of direct service hours in counseling include:

- Counseling: Individual and group counseling, classroom guidance, and individual student observation.
- Internships: Face-to-face counseling, testing, guidance, and consulting with potential clients.
- Direct service hours are measured in increments of an hour, and any increments that are less than half an hour are rounded up to the nearest half hour. For example, **20 minutes spent with a client is recorded as 0.5 hours**.

After successful completion of their first semester of clinical work, students will advance to the “internship” experience(s) that will meet the following clinical criteria:

- After successful completion of the practicum, students complete **600 clock hours** of supervised counseling internship in roles and settings with clients relevant to their specialty area.

- Internship students complete at least **240 clock hours of direct service**.
- Internship students have weekly interaction with supervisors that averages **one hour per week (minimum) of individual supervision** throughout the internship facilitated by a qualified mental health professional (LMHC, LMFT, Psy.D, Ph.D, or LICSW/LASW).
- Internship students participate in an average of **1½ hours per week of group supervision** on a regular schedule throughout the internship.

By the end of their practicum and internship year, MMHC students will have completed a grand total of at least **700 clock hours** at their internship sites, with a **minimum of 280 direct service hours**. Generally speaking, direct service hours include time spent providing direct services to clients and includes activities like individual therapy, group therapy, support groups, family therapy, crisis management, outreach activities, and clinical assessment activities. Activities such as general classroom management, note-taking, coordinating care, and consultation are not considered direct service hours.

Some important notes related to practicum and internship:

1) Prior to progressing into the clinical phase of training, students will complete two total Student Competency Assessments (one at the end of Fall semester and one at the end of Spring) with program faculty to assess student readiness for clinical work.

Recommendations will be forwarded to the Program Director and program core faculty who will make final determination regarding acceptance into clinical training. Students who fail to pass Student Competency Assessments will be reconsidered once after completing another year of classes. Failure to pass a second review will result in dismissal from the program. See “Student Retention Procedures” for more information.

2) A large portion of each MMHC cohort will be assigned to 1 of the 10 participating school districts in ESD 105. Some of these locations will not have work for interns during the summer at the end of the academic year. In this instance, students will be able to complete “micro-internships” during the summer months to ensure the appropriate accrual of clinical hours.

3) A smaller subset of students will not be placed for practicum and internship within ESD 105, and will instead have placements in a variety of community oriented sites (Yakima Nation Behavioral Health, Farmworkers, etc.).

4) With the exception of potential micro-internships for students who are placed in school districts, it is expected that students will remain at one primary

practicum/internship site for the duration of their clinical year (Year 2 of the program). Should there be a need for a student to change sites after their practicum semester, the Psychology Department will handle such cases on a rare, case-by-case basis.

5) Those students who wish to complete field experiences at their current place of employment must submit a written request to the program field placement director (at present, either Dr. Kayden Vargas or Chelsea Buffum) one semester prior to the commencement of the field experience (e.g. Spring semester of Year 1). It should be noted that this practice is discouraged for a variety of reasons. However, program faculty may be willing to make exceptions when the student's work site is able to accommodate for requirements posed by the field experience if an existing agreement with the site does not already exist.

Placement Procedures

Practicum and internship placements are currently offered in selected school and community based settings. The program field placement directors, in conjunction with other program faculty, are responsible for finalizing the placement of students in appropriate sites. Site selection is determined by each student's professional goals, past experience, and level of expertise and availability of community sites.

A list of approved sites will be provided for students by the program faculty and staff sometime in their first year of the MMHC program. After identifying sites of interest at the end of Fall Semester in year 1, and receiving approval by the field supervisors of the MMHC program, students will need to submit a Declaration of Intent form (see Appendix E) to Co-Field Directors Dr. Vargas and/or Chelsea Buffum in which they outline their potential sites of interest. The program faculty and staff will work together to arrange up to 3 interviews for each student progressing into the year of clinical training. Field Directors will track the number of students applying to each site and where final placements have been made after interviews are completed and the program has received feedback from the practicum/internship sites.

Please note that while the program faculty and staff work hard to incorporate student preferences into practicum/internship selections, we cannot guarantee that students will be matched to their top choice. The matching process is a collaborative effort based on input from students, faculty and staff, as well as internship sites.

Ethical Standards During Practicum and Internship

Students are expected to have a working knowledge of and abide by the ethical standards that govern professional practice (ACA Code of Ethics)

https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/ethics/2014-aca-code-of-ethics.pdf?sfvrsn=55ab73d0_1 throughout their practicum and internship experiences. If students have concerns about an ethical dilemma, they should consult with their faculty supervisor, advisor and with their site supervisor. Should any concerns with regard to appropriate behavior under specific circumstances arise, students are to immediately contact their field supervisor or other program faculty. A breach of any ethical standard may result in the need for remediation, or for more serious grievances, termination from the MMHC program.

Supervision

Supervision at clinical sites is provided by practitioners licensed in the fields of mental health counseling and social work. When possible, sites with supervisors that are LMHCs will be given preference in intern assignments.

<https://doh.wa.gov/sites/default/files/legacy/Documents/Pubs/670130.pdf>

When they are not available, site supervisors will be licensed in the fields mentioned above and meet the state's requirement of at least two years of experience as a fully licensed independent practitioner. Sufficiency of supervisors is assessed by the field directors, program directors, and is based on criteria set out by the Washington State Department of Health. Adequate supervision is required in order to be able to house MMHC interns.

For a more detailed description of Practicum and Internship Requirements, please review the MMHC Practicum and Internship Manual.

Professional Liability Insurance

Litigation involving counseling professionals has increased dramatically over the past few years. Adherence to professional ethical standards, as well as high standards of personal and professional conduct, are the best ways to avoid such litigation.

Sometimes, however, despite best efforts, litigation becomes a reality. This fact has prompted wise and prudent practitioners to obtain professional liability insurance. The MMHC program requires each student to obtain professional liability insurance. The

policy must be active within the first two weeks of beginning coursework, and must be maintained throughout the program, especially through practicum and internship. As of the time of the writing of this handbook, ACA provides liability insurance free of charge to those with a student membership in the ACA. Heritage University provides assistance to students to obtain this student membership and liability insurance. Insurance can also be obtained through other professional organizations for a reasonable cost to student members. Students are required to submit a copy of their policy facesheet to the program director within the first two weeks of beginning courses. This copy will be maintained in the student's record.

Background Check Requirements

Practicum and Internship Placements may require clearance prior to engaging in clinical work. Background checks are conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Please consult with faculty if you have concerns about Background Checks.

Student Retention Policy

Students must recognize that academic performance represents only one criterion for continuation in the program. The successful graduate is one who has:

1. Completed all academic tasks.
2. The ability to apply theory to practice.
3. Displayed appropriate professional dispositions including stable and psychologically well-adjusted behaviors.
4. Consistently demonstrated high standards with regard to ethical and professional conduct as reflected in relationships with faculty, staff, peers, and clients.

Faculty are charged with the responsibility of evaluating students on all dimensions of the above four criteria throughout their participation in the program. Evaluation is therefore viewed as a process rather than a singular event.

In addition to receiving a grade reflecting academic achievement in each course, program faculty will observe students' progress in developing professional dispositions which will be focused on personal and professional characteristics. Assessment of dispositions will be used to advise and assist students in developing more appropriate professional behavior.

Student Competency Assessment (SCA)

Because students are not solely evaluated on their academic progress, Student Competency Assessments are conducted in order to assess student growth toward applying theory to practice, displaying and developing appropriate interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, and operating under high standards in regard to ethical and professional conduct. According to the ACA Code of Ethics and CACREP, program faculty are required to evaluate student development in order to assess appropriate fit for the profession of mental health counseling. This is both to protect future clients from impaired practitioners as well as honor and protect students for whom this profession may not be the best fit.

SCAs are conducted after the first and second semesters of the program. The second SCA serves as a mid-point review and is required prior to admission to practicum/internship. Academic performance, core competencies, and professional behaviors both within and outside of the classroom are reviewed.

In preparation for the SCA, students will be asked to assess themselves on a formal Professional Competencies Checklist. MMHC faculty will also formally review students based on these core competencies in addition to academic performance and clinical skill development. Faculty advisors present their assessments and make one of the following recommendations:

- Pass with no concerns.
- No-pass with the stipulation to continue monitoring progress again next semester.
- No-pass with concerns that require corrective action.
- No-pass with concerns that require disciplinary action.

The results of the SCA will be communicated with students. Students who receive no-passes with stipulations to continue monitoring progress next semester are considered to be in compliance, provided they can address the specific concerns by themselves and will show due diligence in doing so. Students who receive no-passes with concerns (either corrective or disciplinary action) will be provided with a Student Development Plan (SDP)

Student Development Plan

Student Development Plans are provided when competency or professional disposition concerns arise. Faculty members provide this plan in order to assist students in every way possible to be successful in the program. SDPs can be developed when students are struggling with classroom performance (e.g., chronically late assignments, failure to use corrective feedback, difficulties with class participation, chronic absenteeism/tardiness, or substandard scholarship and academic writing) or when a student's professional disposition needs improvement (e.g., ethical application, applied critical thinking, awareness of diversity and social justice, interpersonal effectiveness, respectful communication, reflective practices, and self-awareness). An SDP may also be indicated if students are struggling to meet expectations at practicum/internship.

Student Development Plans are developed with the student and student advisor, as agreed upon by MMHC core faculty. Specific action steps and activities will be identified in order to support the student in meeting core competencies, and documented in the SDP. A timeframe will be created in order for the student to complete these action steps. Failure to complete the SDP may result in dismissal from the program. If the student is not satisfied or does not agree with the SDP, they may appeal the decision to the Provost.

Dismissal from the MMHC Program

Grounds for dismissal from the MMHC Program typically involve inappropriate behavior, unprofessional conduct/dispositions, unethical conduct, poor academic performance, and/or failure to complete an SDP. Failure to successfully achieve program benchmarks including successful completion of interviews for practicum/internship may also be grounds for dismissal. Dismissal will typically follow inadequate resolution of the student retention process. Should the student wish to challenge dismissal they will be required to follow the appeal procedure outlined above.

Extracurricular Therapeutic Activities

Students enrolled in graduate training programs sometimes have opportunities to become involved in professional therapy activities that are separate and apart from required program activities. These opportunities are called "externship" therapy

activities. They are considered extracurricular because they are neither conducted under the auspices of the MMHC program nor are they officially supervised by those professionals associated with the program. All non-program therapy activities fall under this definition, regardless of whether the students receive pay for the provision of such services.

Heritage University assumes responsibility for students' therapy activities only within the limits of program requirements. Therefore, the MMHC program discourages students from engaging in externships while in the program. Should students have questions about this, please consult the MMHC Program Director.

Professional Organizations

Developing a professional identity is an important part of becoming a counselor. The MMHC program encourages students to become involved with professional organizations that align with and further professional growth and development. Below are counseling organizations that students should be aware of and that students may want to join.

American Counseling Association

The **American Counseling Association (ACA)** is a leading professional organization that represents counselors and counselors-in-training across the nation. ACA offers various branches that cater to special interests such as school counseling, career counseling, counselor education and supervision, and family counseling. As a student member, you can access discounts on membership, liability insurance, and a wide range of counseling resources, including books, journals, video and audio materials, and developmental workshops led by experts in the field. Additionally, ACA provides job search assistance through database systems and job postings in its monthly newspaper, *Counseling Today*.

For students interested in diversity-oriented professional organizations, particularly those focused on Indigenous, Latine, and LGBTQ communities, ACA has several relevant divisions:

- **SAIGE** (Society for Sexual, Affectional, Intersex, and Gender Expansive Identities)

- **CSJ** (Counselors for Social Justice)
- **AMCD** (Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development)

Beyond ACA, students may also consider broader mental health organizations, such as the **National Latinx Psychological Association** and **ASDAH** (Association for Size Diversity and Health).

We encourage students to join organizations that resonate with their lived experiences and align with their professional interests.

Washington Counseling Association

The Washington Counseling Association (WCA) was formed to address issues at the state level. The WCA serves as an umbrella organization that meets the specialized interests of counselors in diverse work settings. Benefits of membership include a membership directory, newsletter, annual conference, legislative lobbying, and professional networking opportunities.

Professional Licensure

Completion of a degree does not guarantee a license to practice counseling. Each state has its own academic and clinical requirements. The student is responsible for applying for appropriate licensure and for passing state specific exams. For Washington state licensure, students can either take the National Counselor Examination (NCE) OR the National Clinical Mental Health Counselor Examination (NCMHCE). The degree will help students prepare for exams. Faculty believe that attainment of professional status through licensure is an essential aspect of professionalism itself, when it is feasible for students. Therefore, students are encouraged to plan their academic programs in such a manner as to be eligible for appropriate professional credentials and to actively seek such after graduation. Qualification and restrictions should be discussed with your advisor/Program Director.

REMEMBER: Save all course syllabi; copy of university catalog effective when at Heritage University, and documentation from field experiences for the duration of your professional career. You may need them in the future to verify that you have completed requirements for various certifications or licensure.

The following is a description of Washington state licensure option that is typically available to students upon graduation from the MMHC program:

Licensed Mental Health Counselor Associate License

Upon graduation from the MMHC program, students should become eligible to apply for an *associate level license as a "Licensed Mental Health Counselor Associate-LMHCA"*. Associates are able to practice counseling in a variety of settings, while still receiving supervision. Typically, associate level practitioners pay to receive individual supervision upon graduation to begin accruing the post graduate clinical hours necessary to practice independently as an LMHC.

In order to apply for the Associate level license:

- Applicants must have a master's or doctoral degree in mental health counseling or a behavioral science master's or doctoral degree in a field relating to mental health counseling. The department must receive an official transcript with degree and date posted from the applicant's program. Transcripts not in English must have an official translation.
- Applicants must have a degree in a field relating to mental health counseling. It must have a core of study relating to counseling theory and counseling philosophy. It must have either a counseling practicum, or a counseling internship, or both, in the core of study. Exclusive use of an internship or practicum used for qualification must have incorporated supervised direct client contact.

This core of study must include seven content areas from the entire list in subsections (1) through (17) of this section, five of which must be from content areas in subsections (1) through (8) of this subsection. Bolded are the content areas that the Heritage MMHC Program meets:

- 1. Counseling individuals**
- 2. Assessment/diagnosis**
- 3. Ethics/law**
- 4. Counseling groups**

5. **Counseling couples and families**
6. **Developmental psychology (may be child adolescent, adult or life span)**
7. **Psychopathology/abnormal psychology**
8. **Research and evaluation**
9. **Career development counseling**
10. **Multicultural concerns**
11. **Substance/chemical abuse**
12. Physiological psychology
13. Organizational psychology
14. **Mental health consultation**
15. Developmentally disabled persons
16. Abusive relationships
17. Chronically mentally ill

Applicants must complete the subject content form. Official graduate school transcripts must verify course content. If the course title is not clear, applicants will be asked to provide a course syllabus.

State License Verification

Applicants must list all states where they do or did hold credentials. This list must also include when the applicant has applied for a credential, even if a credential was not granted. The jurisdiction where the applicant is or was credentialed must complete and submit the verification form (PDF). The jurisdiction must send the completed form directly to the department.

Personal Data Questions

Each applicant must answer the personal data questions. If there is a positive answer to the professional liability claims history question, the applicant must send an explanation of the nature of the case, data and summary of care given, copies of the original complaint, and the settlement or final disposition. If the case is pending, the applicant must indicate status.

Additional Information/Documents Required

Note: An associate is a pre-licensure candidate who has a graduate degree in a mental health field under RCW 18.225.090 and is gaining the supervision and supervised experience necessary to become a licensed independent clinical social worker, a licensed advanced social worker, a licensed mental health counselor or a licensed marriage and family therapist. Associates may not independently provide social work, mental health counseling or marriage and family therapy for a fee, monetary or otherwise. Associates must work under the supervision of an approved supervisor. Independent social work, mental health counseling or marriage and family therapy is the practice of these disciplines without being under the supervision of an approved supervisor.

Process for Approving/Denying Applications

Credentialing staff members review the application and supporting documents to make an initial determination on eligibility. The recommendation is based upon the requirements outlined in RCW 18.225 and WAC 246-809. Credentialing supervisors approve applications that don't have positive answers to personal data questions, have questionable verifying documents or are otherwise "red flag" applications. "Red flag" applications are forwarded to the exception application process for determination by the appropriate disciplining authority. An applicant will be formally notified of a denial and has the opportunity for a hearing to appeal the decision.

Renewal Requirements

Mental health counselor associates must renew their license every year on the date of issuance. The associate credential can be renewed only six times.

Please consult the appendix to see the LMHC-A crosswalk that outlines how the MMHC program meets licensure requirements. To learn more about the requirements for licensure, please consult the Department of Health for the State of Washington here: <https://doh.wa.gov/licenses-permits-and-certificates/professions-new-renew-or-update/mental-health-counselor/licensing-information>

Substance Use Disorder Professional Trainee

As a part of the MMHC program, students can elect to complete course requirements that would also make them eligible for the Substance Use Disorder Professional Trainee license. This is true at both the bachelor's and master's level at Heritage University within the Department of Psychology. Please consult the SUDPT crosswalk in the appendix for more information on how the MMHC program meets SUDPT criteria. You can learn more about the SUDPT credential here: <https://doh.wa.gov/licenses-permits-and-certificates/professions-new-renew-or-update/substance-use-disorder-professional>

Non Discrimination Clause & Promoting a Just Society

Heritage University is committed to delivering a mission-driven educational program that cultivates in students the capacity to engage effectively across myriad dimensions of diversity. Heritage University is committed to the fair and equal treatment of all students in its educational programs and activities. The University does not discriminate against students based on race, color, national origin, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, age, or disability and complies with all applicable federal or state non-discrimination laws in its instructional programs. The MMHC program is committed to expand student's understanding of diversity and inclusion, in the effort of promoting an equitable and just society.

In an effort to serve the greater Yakima Valley, the Psychology department and the MMHC program is committed to training students who are well equipped to serve constituents of our valley. Further, the American Counseling Association (ACA) and the American Psychological Association (APA) have declared certain elements of social justice to be a priority in modern society and in counselor training. It is our mission to prepare our students to work effectively within rural health settings, school settings, with Spanish speaking and tribal communities, and members of LGBTQIA2S+ communities. In today's polarized society, many conversations have become heated and political that are relevant to the counseling profession. To learn more about the stance of the scientific community on certain hot button topics, please review some of the materials outlined below:

- Climate Justice: <https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/center-resources/climate-change-fact->

[sheet.pdf?sfvrsn=83c7222c_2#:~:text=The%20American%20Counseling%20Association%20and,impending%20consequences%20of%20climate%20change.](#)

- Indigenous Sovereignty: <https://www.counseling.org/about-us/about-aca/values-and-statements/advocacy-for-indigenous-peoples-rights-and-concerns#:~:text=The%20American%20Counseling%20Association%20>
- Anti Racism: <https://www.counseling.org/about-us/about-aca/values-and-statements/anti-racism>
- Transgender and Gender Non Conforming Rights: <https://www.counseling.org/about-us/about-aca/values-and-statements/transgender-nonbinary-issues-concerns>

In sum, while individual counselors may hold diverse opinions on a vast array of topics, the MMHC program is committed to advocating for climate justice, indigenous sovereignty, anti-racism, and justice for all including, but not limited to, immigrants, LGBTQIA individuals, incarcerated individuals, the unhoused, children, and other marginalized groups. The Psychology Department affirms that this is, indeed, the only way mental health practitioners can promote a just and equitable society.

Faculty Recommendations for Credentialing and Employment

Students are welcome to ask for faculty letters of recommendation for credentialing or employment. Please submit a request in a timely manner with a deadline for your letter of recommendation.

Students are expected to collect and keep track of class syllabi and clinical hours worked in order to apply for licensure. Heritage provides an hours tracking software in order to keep track of hours during practicum and internship.

Appendix A: Core Competencies

Program Core Competencies

Course offerings and curriculum align with the requirements set by the Washington State Department of Health to apply to be a licensed mental health counselor-associate.

Student Learning Outcome	Definition
SLO 1	Students understand, identify, and develop strategies for working with clients at different developmental stages, including understanding how addiction, trauma and developmental concerns impact the client and process of human growth and development.
SLO 2	Students understand the impact of culture, including their own, on the counseling process and are able to act within the expectations of multicultural and social justice competencies.
SLO 3	With respect for and healthy collaboration with other professionals, students adopt the professional identity of a counselor and practice as such, including following and knowing the ACA Code of Ethics, state legal codes, reporting and referral processes, and the roles and functions of a professional counselor.

SLO 4	Students understand group counseling dynamics and are able to facilitate various types of groups using appropriate and relevant group facilitation skills to create transformational experiences in serving clients.
SLO 5	Students intentionally, creatively and effectively use essential counseling and interviewing skills in working with clients from various cultures and backgrounds.
SLO 6	Students are able to incorporate theoretical understanding into work with clients, including using techniques and interventions, conceptualization and developing a personal understanding of their own theoretical approach.
SLO 7	Students understand the assessment process in counseling and intentionally and effectively utilize appropriate assessments for a variety of reasons across a variety of settings, particularly within community mental health and educational contexts.
SLO 8	Students are effective consumers of research and understand how to intentionally apply research to the counseling process.

Appendix B: SUDPT Crosswalk

SUDPT Crosswalk

	Training Requirement	Class
A.	Understanding addiction	Addictions
B.	Pharmacological actions of alcohol and other drugs	Substance Use Disorders
C.	Substance abuse and addiction treatment methods	Substance Use Disorders
D.	Understanding addiction placement, continuing care, and discharge criteria, including American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) criteria	Addictions
E.	Cultural diversity, including people with disabilities, and its implication for treatment	Multicultural Counseling
F.	Substance use clinical evaluation	Substance Use Disorders
G.	HIV/AIDS brief risk intervention for people with substance use disorder	Substance Use Disorders
H.	Substance use disorder treatment planning	Substance Use Disorders
I.	Referral and use of community resources	Community Psychology
J.	Service coordination	Consultation and Supervision
K.	Individual counseling	Counseling Skills
L.	Group counseling	Group Counseling
M.	Substance use disorder counseling for families, couples and significant others	Family Systems
N.	Client, family and community education	Community Psychology
O.	Developmental psychology	Human Growth and Development Across the Lifespan
P.	Psychopathology/abnormal psychology	Diagnosis and Assessment
Q.	Documentation, to include screening, intake, assessment, treatment plan, clinical reports, clinical progress notes, discharge summaries and other client-related data	Consultation and Supervision
R.	Substance use disorder confidentiality	Professional, Legal and Ethical Issues in Counseling

S.	Professional and ethical responsibilities	Professional, Legal, and Ethical Issues in Counseling
T.	Relapse prevention	Addictions
U.	Adolescent substance use disorder assessment and treatment	Counseling Children and Adolescents
V.	Substance use disorder case management	Substance Use Disorders
W.	Substance use disorder rules and regulations.	Substance Use Disorders

Appendix C: ACA Code of Ethics

ACA Code of Ethics

A complete version of the ACA Code of ethics can be found here in both English and Spanish: <https://www.counseling.org/knowledge-center/ethics>

Should students, staff, or faculty wish to schedule a consultation regarding the ACA code of ethics, they can do so through the American Counseling Association. The American Counseling Association is pleased to help members with inquiries on ethical practice, career counseling and advice regarding the profession.

Please kindly note that this service is not designed to function as a real time hotline. Inquiries are prioritized, and the ACA standard practice is to respond within three business days of receipt.

Please send an email request to consult@counseling.org to schedule a consultation.

Thank you in advance for your patience.

Appendix D: References

Reference List

Nelson, J.S., & Nelson, C.V. (1995). Predictors of success for students entering graduate school on a probationary basis. (ED 388206). ERIC.
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED388206.pdf>

Appendix E: Declaration of Intent

Declaration of Intent Form- Practicum/Internship

This form is to be utilized to inform clinical faculty supervisors of your preference for practicum/internship, beginning Fall of your second year.

Carefully consider where you would like to utilize your strengths and/or where you would like to grow as a student clinician.

Please provide your top three internship sites:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Please provide any additional information you would like clinical faculty supervisors to know about practicum/internship placement (e.g., strong desire to work with elementary aged children, scheduling issues or difficulties, etc.)

Name: _____

Date: _____

Appendix F: Timeline

Timeline

Task	Time/Date Due
Early Consideration Application Deadline	Fall prior to beginning the program
Interviews	Fall/Winter prior to beginning the program
Early Consideration/Priority Admissions Communicated	Winter prior to beginning the program
Rolling Interviews/Admissions	Winter/Spring prior to beginning the program
In Person Orientation	August 23rd, 2024 12.30pm-5pm
Sign up for ACA Membership and Liability Insurance	First week of classes, August 26-30, 2024
Return Handbook Receipt Form	August 30, 2024
Liability Insurance Facesheet Due	September 2nd 2024
Student Competency Reviews	Finals Week: December 9-13th, 2024
Declaration of Intent/Applications for Practicum/Internship	May 2nd, 2025
Student Competency Reviews	Finals Week: May 12-19th, 2025
Begin Practicum	August 25, 2025 (however, depending on your practicum site, you may need to start earlier)
Apply for Graduation	November 2025 (6 months before expected graduation date)
Take the National Counselor Examination (NCE)- optional	May 2026
Walk at Graduation!	Saturday, May 16, 2026
Complete Internship	Friday, July 17, 2026

Appendix G: Handbook Receipt

Handbook Receipt and Student Checklist

You will receive this document via email and should sign and return it at New Student Orientation or during the first week of classes. Documents should be returned to the Program Director and will be kept in your student file.

Name _____
(Please print)

As a new student of the Masters in Mental Health Counseling Program at Heritage University, you are expected to have read and reviewed this handbook in its entirety and to have completed certain documents by the first semester of your enrollment. Please check the appropriate boxes after you have reviewed and/or completed the following documents:

- MMHC Student Handbook
- American Counseling Association Code of Ethics
- Applied for and returned Liability Insurance Facesheet through the American Counseling Association

By signing this document, you agree to abide by the policies and codes discussed in this handbook.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix F: Professional Competencies Assessment Checklist

Professional Competencies Assessment Checklist

Student Name: _____ Course: _____ Semester/Year: _____

PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES SELF-ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

As you actively sculpt your professional identity and presence, please consider your areas of strength and growth by completing this checklist during Weeks 1, 5, 10 and 15. Faculty members assess these items in students' Evaluator Assessments.

Critical Thinking: Shows ability to think abstractly, recognize multiple sides of an issue and generate creative solutions; demonstrates intellectual curiosity, flexibility, and active engagement with new knowledge.

Beginning ——— Developing ——— Accomplished ——— Exemplary

Verbal Communication: Articulates ideas effectively and maintains congruence between verbal and non-verbal behaviors; shows understanding of group dynamics and awareness of own impact on the group.

Beginning ——— Developing ——— Accomplished ——— Exemplary

Oral Presentation: Able to present ideas in a well-organized format; open and able to respond to questions.

Beginning ——— Developing ——— Accomplished ——— Exemplary

Written Communication: Writes clearly, presents ideas and information in an organized format; demonstrates technical writing skills including appropriate punctuation, spelling, quotations, grammar, and APA style.

Beginning ——— Developing ——— Accomplished ——— Exemplary

Cultural Awareness and Responsiveness: Understands influence of culture on self and others; holds multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills sufficient to work effectively with people of diverse cultures and worldviews.

Beginning ——— Developing ——— Accomplished ——— Exemplary

Social Responsibility: Aware of social, political, and economic inequalities and their psychological effects; shows willingness to address needs of underserved populations.

Beginning ——— Developing ——— Accomplished ——— Exemplary

Emotional Maturity: Willing to examine and take responsibility for personal and professional choices; open and non-defensive in receiving and responding to feedback; flexible and willing to change.

Beginning ——— Developing ——— Accomplished ——— Exemplary

Ethical Conduct: Demonstrates personal integrity, honesty, and responsibility; works toward integration of personal and professional identity.

Beginning ——— Developing ——— Accomplished ——— Exemplary

Interpersonal Skills: Demonstrates empathy, patience, respect, caring, and sense of humor; willing and able to tolerate ambiguity; maintains appropriate boundaries.

Beginning ——— Developing ——— Accomplished ——— Exemplary

Intrapersonal Skills: Demonstrates the ability to self-reflect and attend to self-development; "understand oneself and one's thoughts and feelings, and to use such knowledge in planning and directing one's feelings in addition to being self-motivated.

Beginning ——— Developing ——— Accomplished ——— Exemplary

Attendance and Punctuality: Students are Developing to attend 27 hrs. of class. Late arrivals, early departures, or extended breaks of 15 min or more will be subtracted from time spent in class. If a class must be missed, it is the student's responsibility to email the instructor before or on the day of the absence. The student is responsible for inquiring about the content of that class from peers.

Beginning ——— Developing ——— Accomplished ——— Exemplary

Overall Professional Development:

DEFINITIONS for COMPETENCY LEVELS

Beginning Competency: Failed to meet minimum graduate-level competency in terms of course attendance, scholarship, and performance standards.

Reflects a failure to sufficiently address all the issues specified in the guidelines as indicated in the syllabus, which includes inadequate completion in terms of the defined criteria. The student did not meet minimum attendance, written work, oral presentation, and class participation criteria for satisfactory completion of course; did not present graduate level work.

Developing Competency: Met minimum graduate-level competency in terms of course attendance, scholarship, and performance standards.

Indicates sufficiency in meeting the criteria specified in the syllabus with no major difficulties in terms of the defined criteria. Indicates that the student has met the minimum Competency criteria as well as demonstrated a high level of personal insight and conceptual rigor in terms of the defined criteria. Met all criteria for attendance, written work, oral presentation, and class participation at graduate level of work.

Accomplished Competency: Achieved Developing Competency plus demonstrated mastery of identified course knowledge and/or skills areas.

Indicates that the student has met the “Developing Competency” criteria as well as demonstrated a high level of personal insight and conceptual rigor in terms of the defined criteria, as well as demonstrated a consistently high level of mastery and scholarship in terms of the defined criteria.

Exemplary Competency: Achieved Accomplished Competency plus demonstrated a level of expertise in course knowledge and/or skills areas expected of entry-level master’s practitioners, that is, knowledge and skills that would be expected of a beginning-level master’s practitioner.

Core Faculty Bios

Dr. Leah Merle Batty, LMHC
Program Director, Associate Professor

Dr. Leah Merle Batty previously served as the Admissions Coordinator and the Practicum Director in addition to full-time faculty in the counseling program at Antioch University, in Seattle. This was a few years before she moved to Triumph Treatment Services as the Chief Clinical Officer. She earned her master's in clinical Mental Health Counseling and Drama Therapy from Antioch University Seattle and a Ph.D. in Counseling Education and Supervision (with a Cognate in Creative Arts Therapies) at Antioch's Seattle program. She is a licensed mental health counselor and a drama therapist in addition to fulfilling the child mental health specialist endorsement in WA State. She has decades of experience providing community, counseling, and rehabilitation services to clients and their families dealing with mental health issues. She is currently providing supervision services to new clinicians-in-training, and therapeutic services to adults, children, and families in private practice.

Leah approaches her teaching at Heritage using 'Andragogy' (Malcolm Knowles), a theory of adult learning, and the Integrative Developmental Model toward supervisory relationships, to promote the personal and professional growth of the clinician-in-training. Her therapeutic orientation is integrative and draws from attachment theory, strength-based models, as well as person-centered counseling. A trauma informed lens with a somatic and attachment application, and creative arts therapy intervention focus, are at the core of all work in which Leah engages.

As an educator and child mental health specialist, her research areas of interest include the impact of creative interventions on counselors-in-training in addition to how drama therapy interventions can positively impact a child and adolescent's self-esteem. She aims to infuse a multi-culturally competent focus throughout her classes with creative arts elements. Her passion lies within the threshold of where humanity, education, and counseling unite.

Chelsea Buffum, MS, LMHC
Assistant Professor, Co-Field Director

Chelsea Buffum (she/her) is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor in the state of Washington. Originally from Boulder, CO, she received her Bachelor of Arts in Sociology with a Minor in Women's and Gender Studies from Whitworth University in 2011 and went on to complete her Masters in Mental Health Counseling in 2014 from Central Washington University. She was awarded "Outstanding Clinician" at CWU and is passionate about providing excellent care to clients. She believes that listening and holding space is both an essential human practice and also an art form.

Chelsea has been in private practice for the past seven years, specializing in eating disorders, body image, and disordered eating. Chelsea also served at CWU's Student Medical and Counseling Clinic for four years as a staff clinician and has also had experience in residential eating disorder treatment and medical rehabilitation clinics. Chelsea practices from anti-racist, feminist, and fat liberation values. Known jokingly as the very serious, feminist, studious hand-raiser in class, Chelsea has learned to lighten up over the years while also loving and maintaining academic rigor.

Outside of teaching and therapy, Chelsea loves to lift heavy weights, hike, ski, and (badly) sing karaoke. She and her husband Joel live in Terrace Heights with their dog Buddha and cat Jesus.

Dr. Kayden Vargas
Assistant Professor, Co-Field Director

Dr. Kayden Vargas (they/he) is a psychologist, poet, parent, and scholar living, loving, and working on the homelands of the Yakama people. Kayden grew up in the Brewster Washington, residing on the traditional homelands of the Okanagan (Sylix), Methow (sp̓aʔm̓ul̓əxʷəxʷ), Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla peoples, and the twelve bands of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation. Kayden has a split appointment and teaches at both the undergraduate and master's level in the Psychology department. Prior to coming to Heritage University, they worked as a psychologist-in-residence at Central Washington University (CWU) in Ellensburg, WA. He completed his undergraduate B.A. in Psychology and Spanish, with a minor in Theology from Whitworth University and their Ph.D. degree in Counseling Psychology from University of Oregon, with a specialization in Spanish Language Service Provision.

Dr. Kayden is a Licensed Psychologist in the state of Washington, and a PsyPACT provider, with years of experience working primarily with LGBTQIA2S+, Spanish speaking, and eating disorder recovery communities utilizing primarily relational, abolitionist, liberation, and anti-carceral frameworks for mental health care. Lately, his

clinical interests have expanded to include conducting gender affirming assessments for individuals throughout the country through his PsyPACT designation, particularly in states where gender affirming care is being targeted as an act of transphobic violence against Trans, gender expansive, and indigenous two-spirit communities. Throughout the state of Washington, Kayden also provides consultation and training at local clinics, hospitals, and community organizations about the importance of gender affirming care for all people within rural healthcare systems.

At Heritage University, Kayden is working on developing and implementing a Spanish Language Specialization certificate for Master's students, and you may see them in and out of graduate level coursework and working as a co-field director for the graduate program helping students with their internship placements. In addition to his teaching and clinical interests, Dr. Kayden takes great pride in being a non-traditional academic and is a published poet with recent Pushcart Prize nomination and a debut collection of poems [Dead Name] published with Kith Books (<https://www.kithbooks.com/digital/p/vargas>). In addition to writing and performing poetry, Kayden enjoys spending time with their Vargas family, listening to heavy metal, weightlifting, and anything that involves sitting next to expansive bodies of water. Their first love was, and always will be, the Columbia River.

Dr. Amy Nusbaum
Chair of Psychology Department, Associate Professor

Dr. Amy Nusbaum (she/her) is a first-generation scholar. She grew up in Longview and Toutle, WA, went to Washington State University knowing absolutely nothing about college, and almost failed out her first semester. Luckily, she didn't, and went on to earn her BS in Psychology in 2015, and her MS and Ph.D. in Experimental Psychology in 2016 and 2020, respectively. She has been teaching at Heritage since 2020 and adores the people, community, and mission of HU. Her professional areas of interest include inclusive pedagogy, open educational resources, supporting underserved students (especially student parents, formerly incarcerated students, and students in recovery). and learning to decolonize her teaching. Amy is not a clinician, but as chair of the department will interact with graduate students in administrative and other capacities (and maybe moonlight occasionally as an instructor). She lives with her partner, Shelby, in the lower valley, and together they raise a gaggle of children - some for forever, some for just a day, most for somewhere in between. It is her deepest joy to parent children and teach students who will make the world a better, more just place.