

**Counselor Education Program  
Frequently Asked Questions  
For Those Considering Applying to the MA tracks  
in School or Mental Health Counseling**

**What is the time line for admissions decisions?**

The Admissions Committee is composed of faculty members and students. Each Admissions Committee member carefully reviews each applicant file, which takes about three weeks. The Admissions Committee then meets and selects students from the applicant pool for the group and interview experience, which occurs in March. Applicants for whom travel to Missoula would constitute a major hardship should explain this circumstance in their application materials and the faculty may opt for a telephone interview in these cases. After the interview, the Admissions Committee will meet to determine which applicants will receive offers of admission. The Admissions Committee then forwards its recommendations to the Graduate School, which issues the offer of full admission, provisional admission, or regret. Applicants can expect to hear from the Graduate School in April.

**What's most important? GPA, GRE, letters of recommendation, experience, or the statement of intent?**

The total package that an applicant submits is what is important. We do not admit "by the numbers," though certain GPA/GRE minimums usually apply. What predicts success in graduate school is an applicant's motivation and the quality of his or her previous academic performance. The pattern of grades can be important. If a person has had little experience working or volunteering in human service or teaching, this is a concern to the Admissions Committee. Letters of recommendation are important. These give the Admissions Committee insight into an applicant's interpersonal skills, purpose, counseling experience, research or teaching skills and work habits. For the Masters of Arts degree, the Graduate School GPA minimum is 3.0 and the GRE minimum is a total of 900 for the verbal and math sections. We especially like a strong verbal score because communication skills are important in counseling. The field from which you received your undergraduate degree is not important, though you must complete the pre-requisites before or during your first year of study. For the Ed.S., the GRE total (verbal and math) should be 1000 with a graduate degree GPA of at least 3.5. For the Ed.D., the GRE total should be 1100 and the graduate GPA at least 3.5. On rare occasions, in the event of a lower GRE score or GPA, a combination of other factors may allow for provisional acceptance into one of these programs.

**What are the program pre-requisites?**

Most students come from backgrounds in either the social sciences or teaching, but some come from other fields. All students must have an undergraduate course in developmental psychology, abnormal psychology or child/adolescent psychological disorders, and statistics. School Counseling applicants must have an introduction to special education course and Mental Health Counseling students must have a course in social process (communication studies/social psychology). Whenever possible, applicants should complete all pre-requisites prior to enrollment. At a minimum, all applicants should be able to use the Internet for research and communication and be proficient in the use of computers for word processing.

**How can I prepare for the interview?**

The purpose of the interview experience is to give you an opportunity to interview and meet the faculty and some current students as well as for the faculty and students to meet you. We are particularly interested in our "goodness of fit" together. Are your goals and understanding of professional school or mental health counseling compatible with our program and the field more generally? What is your experience in human services or

teaching and how does this inform your interest in the field? Graduate study is stressful. How have you met previous challenges in your life? How do you imagine balancing graduate study with your other life responsibilities? What questions do you have for us? Perhaps most important is your interpersonal competence. The ability to build relationships is central to being an effective counselor.

### **Can I choose not to participate in the interview?**

Applicants are strongly encouraged to participate in the interview. If attendance would constitute a significant hardship, please notify the teaching assistant at (406) 243-4205 and then explain the nature of the hardship in writing. In certain circumstances, we will conduct a telephone interview. Approval of a telephone interview is the decision of the Admissions Committee. Face to face interviews are conducted on the Missoula Campus

### **Does my undergraduate work count towards my graduate degree?**

The only undergraduate work that applies is completion of pre-requisites. Pre-requisites cannot substitute for graduate program requirements. No undergraduate course can substitute for graduate course work.

### **I have already completed some graduate work elsewhere. What can I transfer in?**

Courses that are transferred must receive the approval of the student's advisor (during the first semester of enrollment), up to 9 semester credits. The course cannot be in the workshop or continuing professional education format. It must have been taken for a letter grade and a grade of A or B must have been received. The course must have been taken at an institution that offers a graduate degree in Counseling or very closely-related field and must be less than six years old at the time of the student's *graduation* from the UM Counseling program. This "aging of courses" does not apply to either the Ed.S. or the Ed.D. degree programs, but courses must be approved by the student's advisor. Finally, the course must be a very close match to the course we would require in our program. Approval is not automatic. If advisor approval is obtained, the student submits the documenting transcript(s) and Counselor Education program recommendation to the Graduate School during the *second* semester of graduate study.

### **What about non-degree course work at The University of Montana?**

Though graduate students can bring in 9 semester credits of non-degree work, applicants generally cannot take Counselor Education courses in a "graduate, non-degree" status. You must be admitted to the program, with the possible exception of certain Summer Session courses. Other exceptions are some courses in the School of Education, such as EDLD/C&I/HHP 520 (Research and Program Evaluation) or a UG, 400-level course (taken for graduate credit) in special education, for those in the School Counseling Track.

### **Can I get course credit for counseling-like work I did before I entered the program?**

We do not give course or clinical hours credit for work completed prior to entering the program, though such experience will most likely help you obtain admission.

### **When can I start counseling people as part of my graduate program?**

Normally clinical work commences in the second semester of full-time study and in the third or fourth semester of study for part-time students. All Master of Arts degree program students must successfully complete (a grade of "B" or higher with no major clinical or interpersonal concerns) the following courses prior to engaging in clinical work: COUN 511 (Theories), COUN 512 (Fundamentals, which includes pre-practicum experience), COUN 520, Group Counseling Theory (this is a co-requisite). For mental health track, PSYCH 530 (Interviewing and Case History) is also a pre-requisite and COUN 615, Diagnosis and

Treatment Planning is a co-requisite for doing clinical work. For school track, COUN 565, School Counseling: Program Development and Supervision, is a prerequisite. There may be additional requirements for particular clinical or school settings. Requirements will vary for students with an awarded master's degree who are enrolled in the Ed.S. program. Continued enrollment in clinical courses is dependent on satisfactory performance in earlier clinical courses.

**Can I get internship credit for my job while I am in the program?**

If your employment remains the same, you will not likely be approved for credit. During the time that you are enrolled in the Internship/Counseling Skills course (COUN 585), if you receive significantly increased responsibilities and an approved, licensed, on-site supervisor provides weekly supervision, this may be possible. This exception must be approved by the faculty and is not automatic.

**I am an international applicant or have limited English proficiency because English is not my first language. Are admissions standards different for me?**

Typically, five to fifteen percent of Counselor Education students are international students. International students bring their unique personalities and cultural perspectives and make a vital contribution to our program. International applicants should know that written and conversational facility with English is very important because counseling is a verbally oriented profession. Students complete 700-1000 or more counseling hours during the program. They must facilitate group counseling, make counseling-related oral presentations and work with families, children and adults, in addition to writing numerous conceptual papers. Students do a considerable amount of reading. If the student's English is not strong enough for clear communication, the faculty may ask the student to refrain from certain aspects of the program and/or seek additional assistance until English facility is improved. If you are a US citizen or long-term resident and English is not your first language, be sure to let the Admissions Committee know in your letter of intent. Some of the above information may be important to you.

**Does the Counselor Education program offer teaching assistantships?**

The program has one M.A. level teaching assistantship that is reserved for a student in the second year or higher. We also have one doctoral-level assistantship. There are other teaching assistantships on campus, often available through competitive application. There are a limited number of assistantships available to Native American students through individual graduate school programs. Check with the Counselor Education program if this is of interest to you. Some internship sites compensate students modestly for their work, though this compensation is never adequate for more than partial support. Students interested in the teaching assistantships should be aware that both each department teaching assistant position is considered a major commitment to the program. Significant employment responsibilities in addition to a teaching assistantship are discouraged.

**What about financial aid and tuition and fees for graduate study? Where can I get information?**

For financial aid information, visit [www.umt.edu/finaid/](http://www.umt.edu/finaid/) or (406) 243-5373.

**What constitutes full time graduate study and continuous enrollment?**

Full time graduate study is 12 credits per semester. Continuous enrollment is one credit or more. For the purposes of receiving financial aid, a slightly lesser number of credits may apply. Please check with the Financial Aid Office as noted above for more information. Check with the Graduate School website on timelines and policies.

**I am an out-of-state applicant. How soon after I enter the State of Montana can I get "in state" status for tuition and fees?**

These rules and designations change over time and are applied system-wide. Students are encouraged to visit <http://ordway.umt.edu/AA/GRAD/index.cfm/name/residencyinfo> or contact the Graduate School ([www.umt.edu/grad/](http://www.umt.edu/grad/)) at (406) 243-2572 for assistance and additional information.

**Can I combine programs, such as School Counseling and School Psychology or School Counseling and Mental Health Counseling?**

It is possible to request courses and/or to combine programs, though the number of credit hours required becomes large. Students should contact a faculty member in School Psychology (<http://psychweb.psy.umt.edu/www/graduate.asp?type=dop&class=3>) to discuss adding additional School Psychology Courses to become certified in that area. Students wishing to combine the two areas of the Master of Arts degree in Counseling may be better served by graduating in one track and later, entering the Ed.S. degree program. Students graduating with a large M.A. degree (70 credits or more) will be placed on most school districts' pay scales as "Masters only," even though their degree may be twice as long as other school-related Masters degrees. Combining degree programs is never automatic and requires an internal application process. Students can confer with their advisors.

**Can I attend graduate school in Counselor Education part time?**

Yes. Some Counselor Education students are full-time and the remainder part time. It is best if you enroll in at least six credits (usually two courses per term) so you can feel you are a part of the program and make steady progress. This can make for a hectic life if you are employed full time and/or have a young family. We encourage students to cut down on employment where possible. Your graduate degree is a major life commitment. A full-time load is four courses (12 credits). It is possible to take five courses (15 credits), but this is taxing as a long-term strategy.

**What about Summer School?**

Certain Counselor Education courses are offered *only* during summer sessions. Applicants should be aware that they cannot complete the M.A. degree programs without some Summer Session enrollment. Students wishing to complete either track in two calendar years must plan very carefully and enroll in Summer School to complete their program of study.

**How does the Counselor Education program deliver courses?**

We have a campus-based program of about 45-50 students. Students have varied lives. Some are teachers, some are employed in the community, and some are parents with families. Scheduling for such a diverse group is a challenge. In our scheduling decisions, we pay attention to who is at what stage of the program. We cannot schedule courses at times that are maximally convenient for individual students, though we try to take particular circumstances into account when these do not conflict with other students' particular circumstances. Applicants must count on sometimes rearranging their lives to accommodate graduate school.

**Once I have been admitted to the program, when can I start taking courses?**

Students are admitted in the Spring and can commence their graduate studies either Summer Session or Fall Semester. If you wish to begin study during the Summer, please notify the advisor assigned to you in the letter you receive admitting you to the program. Courses that will be offered during the Summer will be listed in the Summer Session catalog, available from Continuing Education at <http://www.umt.edu/ce/summer/>.

**Can I defer beginning the program until the next year?**

All admitted students must begin their studies the Summer Session or Fall Semester after admission. We do not offer deferred admission. If you find you need to delay beginning graduate school, you must reapply in the following year.

**What is the requirement for continuous registration after I am admitted?**

All Counselor Education students, whatever their stage of study, must register for at least one credit each semester. Registration and payment of fees must occur during the first three weeks (15 days) of each semester. Finishing "incompletes" does not constitute continuous registration. Students who do not register for at least one credit will be dropped from the program and must reapply. Readmission is not automatic. See the Graduate School website for more information.

**Once I am admitted to the program, what about taking a leave of absence?**

A leave of absence must be approved both by the program faculty and by the Dean of the Graduate School. Approval is dependent on the reason for the leave. Requests are reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Students should discuss taking a leave of absence with their advisor. There are often good alternatives to taking a leave of absence. See the Graduate School website (<http://ordway.umt.edu/aa/grad/>) for more information.

**What accreditation does the Counselor Education program hold?**

The University of Montana is nationally accredited by the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges (NWASC). The School Counseling program is accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and approved by the Montana Office of Public Instruction. The Mental Health Track within the Counseling Program is approved by the Montana Board of Social Work Examiners and Professional Counselors. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), a specialized accrediting body recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), has granted accreditation to the following programs in the Counselor Education Program in the Department of Counselor Education at the University of Montana: *Mental Health Counseling (M.A.)* and *School Counseling (M.A.)*.

**I have an M.A. in Counseling from another institution and want to be certified or licensed as a school counselor or an LCPC. Can the faculty advise me about whether my degree is licensable?**

The Counselor Education faculty does not offer transcript review to determine eligibility for licensure unless a person has been admitted to our program. Only the Montana Board of Social Work Examiners and Professional Counselors is authorized to officially review a person's transcripts for licensure. We do not make recommendations regarding applicants for Montana certification as School Counselor unless they are our graduates.

**How many students are in the mental health counseling program?**

We usually accept about 16-18 students each year--about half mental health track and half school track. However, the exact numbers vary, and since some students take longer than 2 years to complete the program, the total number of students enrolled in all tracks at any one time is usually around 50.