

University of Iowa
Counseling Psychology Program

Policy on Student Ethical Misconduct, Problematic Behavior, Academic Performance, and
Competence

(This policy draws on the policies of a variety of academic/educational programs at Seton hall University, Penn State University, Yale University, University of Washington, The University of Iowa, and Texas Women's University.)

Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to clarify and identify areas of professionalism, academic performance, and ethical conduct expected of the students in the Counseling Psychology Program at The University of Iowa, and to describe the procedures for identifying, assessing, and addressing issues related to impairment, ethical misconduct, problematic behavior, academic performance concerns, and competence.

The Counseling Psychology Program at The University of Iowa has a responsibility to protect clients, students, faculty, and the public from harm. The Program also has a responsibility to protect students' rights. The program is governed by the American Psychological Association's Ethical Principles and Code of Conduct.

Definitions

Impairment is defined as an interference in professional functioning that is reflected in one or more of the following ways:

- Inability or unwillingness to acquire and integrate professional standards into one's repertoire of professional behavior;
- Inability to acquire professional skills and perform at an accepted level of competency;
- or
- Inability to control personal stress, psychological dysfunction, or emotional reactions that may affect professional functioning.

Incompetence is defined as a lack of ability, which may include either professional or interpersonal skill, or academic deficiency. When students continue to provide psychological services beyond their current level of competence, this is an ethical violation.

Ethical Misconduct occurs when the Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct produced by the American Psychological Association (APA) are not followed. This code is intended to provide both the general principles and the specific decision rules to cover most situations encountered by psychologists in their professional activities. It has as its primary goal the welfare and protection of the individuals and groups with whom psychologists work. It is the individual responsibility of each psychologist to aspire to the highest possible standards of conduct. Psychologists respect and protect human and civil rights, and do not knowingly participate in or condone unfair discriminatory practices.

Problematic Behaviors refer to a student's behaviors, attitudes, or characteristics that may require remediation, but are perceived as not excessive or unexpected for professionals in training. Performance anxiety, discomfort with clients' diverse lifestyles and ethnic backgrounds, and lack

of appreciation of agency norms are examples of problematic behaviors that are usually remedied and not likely to progress into impairment status.

[Lamb, Cochran, & Jackson (1991). Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 22, 291-296.]

Procedures

Impairment, incompetence, ethical misconduct, academic performance issues, and/or problematic behavior may be identified in a variety of ways and by a variety of persons, including but not limited to students, faculty, supervisors, clients, and/or members of the public. Any concern raised should be brought to the Program Coordinator. Confidentiality must be ensured. When a potential concern reaches the Program Coordinator, the Coordinator will inform all members of the Counseling Psychology Faculty and the issue will be discussed at the next faculty meeting, unless in the judgment of the faculty a special meeting should be called.

Following this meeting, the student will be informed in writing by the Program Coordinator of the issues surrounding the case and asked to meet with the entire Counseling Psychology Faculty to discuss the situation.

Areas to be reviewed and discussed at this meeting will likely include the nature, severity, and consequences of the situation. The following questions, among others, may be posed at this stage (adapted from Lamb, Cochran, & Jackson, 1991):

1. What are the actual behaviors that are of concern, and how are those behaviors related to the goals of the program?
2. How and in what settings have these behaviors been manifested?
3. What were the negative consequences for the training agency or others (e.g., clients, other students) of the problematic behaviors.
4. Who observed the behaviors in question?
5. Who or what was affected by the behavior (clients, agency, atmosphere, training program, etc.)?
6. What was the frequency of this behavior?
7. Has the student been made aware of this behavior before the meeting, and if so, what was the response?
8. Has the feedback regarding the behavior been documented in any way?
9. How serious is this behavior on the continuum of ethical and professional behavior?
10. What are the student's ideas about how the problem may be remediated?

While each case is different and requires individual assessment, the following factors may indicate that the problem is more serious and may represent an impairment rather than a problematic behavior:

1. The student does not acknowledge, understand or address the problematic behavior when it is identified.

2. The problematic behavior is not merely a reflection of a skill deficit that can be rectified by training.
3. The quality of service delivered by the person suffers.
4. The problematic behavior is not restricted to one area of professional functioning.
5. The behavior has the potential for ethical or legal ramifications if not addressed.
6. A disproportionate amount of attention by training personnel is required.
7. Behavior does not change as a function of feedback.
8. Behavior negatively affects public image of agency of the university or training site.

Ample time will be allowed in this meeting for the student to present views of the situation and to ask questions.

After this meeting with the student, the faculty will meet to determine next steps. If the faculty determines that further steps are required in response to the situation, they will develop a written plan for remediation or some other appropriate course of action (in rare cases, termination from the program) and will schedule a meeting to discuss this concern with the student within four weeks of their initial meeting with the student. Students may submit their own ideas for remediation to the faculty, through their advisors. The faculty will consider the student's recommendations in developing their own recommendations. The plan will be in writing and documented by the student's advisor.

The student will be given the opportunity to accept the recommendations, to provide a written rebuttal, and/or to appeal. If the student chooses to provide a rebuttal, the program faculty will meet again to consider any new evidence presented by the student and will provide written documentation of their decision within three weeks of the date the rebuttal was received. If the student wishes to appeal the faculty's decision, he or she may contact the DEO.

Regardless of the outcome of the meeting, the student and advisor will schedule a follow-up meeting to evaluate the student's adjustment to the process, and to recommend potential sources of guidance and assistance when necessary.

The remediation process will follow the written plan, which must include scheduled review dates and target dates for each issue identified. Examples of actions that may be included in the remediation plan include – but are not limited to – an increase in didactic instruction, a decrease in course load, a decrease in or temporary suspension of clinical responsibilities, increased supervision and/or faculty advisement, leave of absence, and individual psychotherapy. Progress for the initial remediation plan will be monitored at each faculty meeting for one semester (or a period specified by the faculty). After the six-month (or specified) period, the faculty will determine if the student has successfully addressed all components of the remediation plan. If not, the student may be placed onto a second remediation plan, which is considered a formal disciplinary action by the counseling psychology program and will be reported to APPIC on the student's application for internship. Students will be placed onto disciplinary action for a period of time determined by the Counseling Psychology faculty. Progress during the disciplinary action period must be reviewed at least once every semester for the Fall and Spring semesters for

one year. Additional reviews may be scheduled as necessary. After each review, a copy of the current Remediation Plan, including student comments and faculty signatures must be filed in the student's portfolio. If progress is viewed by the faculty as insufficient during either the initial remediation plan or disciplinary action periods, they may recommend either a change in the remediation plan or dismissal. The student will have an opportunity for rebuttal or appeal, as described above.

Academic Performance

We expect CP students to maintain acceptable grades in all their courses. In courses where grades are given (i.e., A through F), doctoral students are expected to make grades of B or better. Receiving a C in a course does not reflect adequate performance in the course. In those cases where students receive a C in their course, the following procedures will apply.

Students receiving their first C (- or +) must inform their advisor immediately and will be put on an internal academic remediation plan with the counseling psychology program. The remediation plan will include the following stipulations. First, the student will need to meet with the faculty to discuss academic progress issues. Second, the student will be mandated to retake the course to make a grade of B or better. Third, the student will consult with their faculty advisor to discuss time management, study skills, and schedule changes to assist the student with their academic progress. The student will have one year to meet these stipulations. If the plan is not successfully completed within one year, the faculty will follow-up with disciplinary action. If students receive more than one C (- or +) in any semester or receive a second C (- or +) during their course work, faculty will convene to discuss appropriate action which may include a determination of failure to make successful academic progress.

In those cases, wherein the student fails to make successful academic progress, the student will meet with the faculty to discuss termination from the program. Failure to make satisfactory academic progress may be defined as: (a) earning grades of C in two or more courses; (b) receiving a non-satisfactory in any courses where grades are given by Satisfactory (S) or Non-Satisfactory (NS); or (c) failing any graduate-level academic course (grade of D or F).

Additional Points of Emphasis

- A. Not every contingency can be covered in this policy. Exceptions may be made in unusual circumstances and/or if public/student welfare is at risk.
- B. Confidentiality should be maintained at all times.
- C. This policy is subject to annual review/revision.

Signatures

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| _____ | _____ |
| Student | Date |
| _____ | _____ |
| Advisor | Date |