

Specialization in Marriage and Family Therapy Program Manual

**(Updated August 24, 2023)**

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# Vision, Mission and Values

## University

Northern Illinois University's **vision** is to be an engine for innovation to advance social mobility; promote personal, professional and intellectual growth; and transform the world through research, artistry, teaching and outreach.

The **mission** of Northern Illinois University is to empower students through educational excellence and experiential learning as we pursue knowledge, share our research and artistry and engage communities for the benefit of the region, state, nation and world.

In pursuing our vision and fulfilling our mission, we value and practice:

* Curiosity and creativity.
	+ We provide our students active learning experiences.
	+ We champion innovation.
	+ We commit our resources to supporting students, faculty and staff in their research, artistry and professional development.
* Equity and inclusion.
	+ We seek and are strengthened by the diverse perspectives and experiences of our university community members.
	+ We use an inclusive decision-making process.
	+ We appreciate and respect every member of our community.
* Ethics and integrity.
	+ We prepare our students to become global leaders who work to build a better society.
	+ We model ethical behavior in and out of the classroom.
	+ We are transparent and accountable to our stakeholders.
* Service and stewardship.
	+ We serve society and confront local, national and global challenges through collaborations that improve our learning, teaching and research.
	+ We make accessible the knowledge and resources we create.
	+ We promote our students' success through advising and mentoring.

For the most up to date version of the Vision, Mission and Values, please visit [NIU’s At-a-Glance](https://www.niu.edu/at-a-glance/) webpage.

## College of Health and Human Sciences

The mission of the College of Health and Humans Sciences is to promote health and well-being through scholarship that integrates teaching, research and service. The vision of the College is to be nationally recognized for quality and impact of research, teaching and service.

### Core Values

* **Excellence**Using vision and innovation to facilitate outstanding teaching/learning, research, practice and service
* **Integrity**Behaving in accordance with ethical principles including honesty, fairness, beneficence, respect and stewardship
* **Collaboration**Working together with individuals and groups to enhance wellbeing, facilitate student success, research productivity and achievement of service goals
* **Diversity**Recognizing, cultivating and celebrating differences to achieve inclusivity and social justice

## School of Family and Consumer Sciences

The mission of the School of Family and Consumer Sciences at Northern Illinois University is to generate and transmit knowledge that supports families and individuals in meeting human needs for self-development, social interaction, resource allocation, clothing and hospitality.

This mission is implemented through the design and delivery of educational programs, the conduct and dissemination of research and leadership in community, governmental and professional activities. A major premise of the academic programs and activities of the school is the connectedness of physical, economic, social and cultural systems that affect the human condition.

## Area of Human Development and Family Sciences

The mission of Human Development and Family Sciences (HDFS) is to prepare students for a career that promotes the well-being and healthy development of families, individuals and relationships. HDFS programs provide students with a theoretical foundation and practical application on the relations between human development, family dynamics and the broader social context across the life span through teaching, research and community services.

## SMFT Program

### Program Description

The Specialization in Marriage and Family Therapy (SMFT) within the Applied Human Development and Family Sciences (AHDFS) program, is a 54-credit M.S. degree program accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE) since 1983. The program is comprised of rigorous academic education and supervised clinical training. The program typically is completed in two academic years comprised of five consecutive semesters when pursued full-time. Students may take up to six consecutive years to complete the program. Our process of education and training is carefully planned to facilitate clinical growth in core competencies, the mastery of student learning outcomes and graduation as a skilled entry-level couple and family therapist. SMFT is a program of the Human Development and Family Sciences (HDFS) Area of the School of Family and Consumer Sciences at NIU. Graduates earn an M.S. degree in Applied Human Development and Family Sciences with a Specialization in Marriage and Family Therapy.

### Program Mission

The mission of the Specialization in Marriage and Family Therapy Program is to educate and train the next generation of culturally conscious couple and family therapists who are grounded in systemic theories and ethical clinical practice that provide research informed therapeutic services to diverse individuals, couples, families and communities.

### Description of Faculty

The SMFT Program is primarily directed and delivered by *Core Faculty.* Their primary job responsibilities are the education and training of SMFT students and the administration of the SMFT Program and the Couple and Family Therapy Clinic (CFTC). Core Faculty teach the SMFT core curriculum courses and provide Practicum supervision. Core Faculty are licensed MFTs currently practicing as therapists and American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) Approved Supervisors or Supervisor Candidates. View [individual descriptions of core faculty.](https://www.chhs.niu.edu/facs/about/faculty/index.shtml#hdfs)

*Non-Clinical* faculty are HDFS professors or adjuncts who teach specialized courses (e.g. Research Methods) and/or electives for the program. Under special circumstances, a qualified Non-Clinical Faculty member may serve as Practicum Supervisor.

View [demographic information of faculty](https://www.chhs.niu.edu/facs/programs/human-development/marriage-family-therapy/student-outcomes.shtml).

### SMFT Program Director

The Program Director (PD) has a 12-month appointment, is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and is an AAMFT Approved Supervisor. The program director assumes administrative responsibilities for the program. The primary responsibilities include managing COAMFTE accreditation reports and issues, overseeing course curriculum, recruiting students to the program, teaching graduate and undergraduate courses, providing clinical supervision, being the contact person for program applicants, supervising program graduate assistant (GA), organizing and facilitating SMFT faculty meetings and supervising the CFTC clinic director.

### Clinic Director

The clinic director is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and AAMFT Approved Supervisor or Supervisor Candidate. The clinic director provides administrative leadership for the CFTC and off-campus Internship placements. The administrative responsibilities of the clinic director including fiscal management, oversight of daily functioning, supervision of the Clinic Graduate Assistant, marketing of the CFTC, coordinating the internship placement process, developing/monitoring internship sites, making Practicum assignments and ensuring the completion of Practicum and Internship evaluations.

# Program Educational Outcomes

The education and training of the SMFT Program is designed to fulfill its mission to facilitate the development of highly competent couple and family therapists. This educational design is guided by the following **Program Goals**:

**Program Goal #1**: SMFT students will successfully complete the program as competent and ethical entry- level couple and family therapists and pursue a career as a CFT.

**Program Goal #2:** SMFT students will demonstrate integration of MFT, family and developmental theories.

**Program Goal #3**: SMFT students will demonstrate the skills essential to the successful practice of marriage and family therapy with individuals, couples and families.

**Program Goal #4**: SMFT students will demonstrate intentional consideration to cultural context and integrate cultural context in the assessment, conceptualization and treatment of clients.

The SMFT and HDFS faculty have identified following 12 **Student Learning Outcomes** (SLO) that are essential to the fulfilment of our mission and the realization of our Program Goals:

## HDFS Student Learning Outcomes

* **SLO #1**: Demonstrate the ability to understand and apply theories of human development, family relationships and human ecology to individual and family development across the lifespan.
* **SLO #2**: Demonstrate the ability to apply ethical and reflective approaches to the study of and practice with individuals, couples and families.
* **SLO #3**: Show proficiency in professional oral and written communication skills and the use of empirically-based information on human development and family sciences.
* **SLO #4**: Demonstrate the ability to understand, apply and synthesize research related to the study of human development and family sciences.
* **SLO #5**: Demonstrate the ability to work with a diverse set of families and individuals by using culturally-relevant research, theory, skills and approaches.

## SMFT Student Learning Outcomes

* **SLO #1**: Demonstrate an understanding of human development across the individual life span and the family life cycle and the ability to integrate theories of development into their clinical work.
* **SLO #2**: Display a comprehension of systems theory, including classic and contemporary CFT theories, with the capacity to employ systems theories in therapy with couples, families and individuals.
* **SLO #3**: Show proficiency in the interpersonal and therapeutic skills essential to the successful practice of couple and family therapy.
* **SLO #4**: Make effective use of clinical supervision including openness to supervisory feedback, active participation, diligent preparation for supervision, ability to evaluate their own work and implementation of recommendations into clinical work with clients.
* **SLO #5**: Exhibit intentionality to cultural diversity and awareness of the contextual factors that impact clients along with the ability to skillfully integrate this cultural awareness in therapy with diverse individuals, couples and families.
* **SLO #6**: Demonstrate a beginning- level knowledge of MFT research; an understanding of the research conducted by the CFT Clinic and the capacity to use this research in their therapy with clients.
* **SLO #7**: Display a comprehension of the AAMFT Code of Ethics and legal issues pertinent to couple and family therapists. Demonstrate the capacity to assess and to apply an ethical decision-making model to ethical and legal issues in clinical work.

# Educational Framework

The educational framework of the SMFT Program is comprised of academic preparation and clinical training designed to facilitate clinical competency, fulfill the SMFT Mission and meet our Program Goals and Student Learning Outcomes.

## Teaching Philosophy

The teaching philosophy of the SMFT Program is grounded in the ***Practitioner-Scholar*** model, which is a strong fit with our primary mission of training the next generation of couple and family therapists. Consequently, the core MFT courses have high academic standards intended to build a strong knowledge base of theory, research and practice. At the same time, courses are designed to facilitate growth in the clinical skills and ethical, professional competence of the student. In-class teaching modalities (e.g. analyzing video; assessing cases) and course assignments, then, are designed to promote an in-depth understanding of MFT theory and research along with the essential ability to apply this knowledge to therapy with clients through clinical skills such as assessment, case conceptualization, treatment planning and intervention. Historically, SMFT faculty have had extensive clinical experience in addition to their advanced education and training and scholarly contributions to the field of marriage and family therapy.

## SMFT Training Philosophy

Conducting therapy under close supervision is the core of clinical training since students grow primarily through the combination of experience, reflection and guidance. Thus, openness to supervisory feedback, follow-through on recommendations and working on clinical and personal shortcomings are essential to therapist growth. Supervision facilitates therapist development from a foundation of basic, ethical therapy skills to an effective personal therapeutic style rooted firmly in systemic theory by growth in a) confidence; b) clinical skills; and c) intentionality. In addition, our clinical supervision is contextually aware and culturally informed. Finally, supervision addresses the intersection of the personal and the professional by identifying when a student’s personal issues adversely impact their therapy and/or hinder growth as a therapist. Working on these personal issues, however, is never within the scope of clinical supervision.

## MFT Core Competencies

While the MFT Core Competencies are comprehensive, the SMFT faculty identified eleven (11) core clinical skills of competent therapists underlying the MFT Core Competencies (CC) delineated below:

* Basic counseling skills and foundational family therapy techniques
* Theoretical foundation
* Diagnosis and systemic assessment
* Treatment planning
* Intervention
* Safety planning and crisis intervention
* Human development
* Cultural and contextual awareness
* Mental health professional
* Ethical and professional practice
* Research

# Program Requirements

## Requirements for Graduation

Graduates of the program receive a Master of Science degree in Applied Human Development and Family Sciences with a Specialization in Marriage and Family Therapy. Students are apprised of these requirements in the Student Handbook reviewed early in their first semester. The academic and training requirements for graduation from the SMFT program are described below:

* ***Credits***: Students must complete 54 academic credits including 39 academic credits (13 courses) and 15 clinical training credits. The academic courses and clinical training credits are described in detail above.
* ***Certifications:*** Each student must complete certification in Gottman I-II Level trainings and as a PREPARE/ENRICH facilitator. This is typically completed in the first year of the program.
* ***Comprehensive Exams****:* Students mustsuccessfully pass a Comprehensive Exam with three questions including a) General Question; b) Research Question; and c) Special SMFT Question.
* ***Thesis Option:*** Students may opt to do a research thesis in lieu of the Comprehensive Exams. The thesis option requires six (6) additional credits (699A) for consultation with the Thesis Chair and committee members. Th
* ***Practicum:***  Student must pass 12 credits (5 courses) of Practicum (HDFS-639) including satisfactory evaluations of clinical growth and competency.
* ***Internship:***  Students must pass three (3) semesters (1credit each) of internship (HDFS-633) including satisfactory evaluations of clinical growth and competency.
* ***Theory of Change Papers/Presentations:*** Required Integrative Experience for HDFS-639 (III and V)
* ***Client Contact Hours:*** Students mustcomplete 500 client contact hours including a) 400 or more face-to-face therapy hours; and b) 100 Teaming hours. A minimum of 200 of the 500 client contact hours must be relational hours (couple or family). At least 250 of the hours must be acquired through CFTC. At least 250 hours have to be in-person clinical hours.
* ***Approved Supervision:***  Each student must complete 100 hours of supervision provided by an AAMFT Approved Supervisor. This supervision will be provided by SMFT faculty or their designee.
* ***“Raw Data” Supervision:***  Students must accumulate a minimum of 50 hours of “raw data” supervision, defined as either a live session or video of a session is observed and discussed with a supervisor.

## Time Limits for Graduation

The student must fulfill all requirements for a degree within the six consecutive years immediately preceding the date of the student’s graduation from that degree program. This time limit applies to enrollment in all graduate course work used to satisfy degree requirements including work for which transfer credit is allowed.

If an NIU course taken to complete the requirements for the master’s degree does not fall within the six-year period allowed for the degree program, the student’s major department may require the student to retake the course for credit or may allow the student to demonstrate current knowledge of the subject matter. In the latter case, currency must be demonstrated to the satisfaction of the department offering the course through successful completion of an appropriate examination or other assessment if available from the department. Transfer courses falling outside the limitation of time cannot be used in a graduate program.

## Graduation Rates

Graduation rates are reported to COAMFTE in the program’s Annual Report and posted on the [SMFT website](https://www.chhs.niu.edu/facs/programs/human-development/marriage-family-therapy/student-outcomes.shtml).

# Curriculum Sequence

## Rationale for Curriculum Sequence – Year I

The academic education of the first year focuses on building a strong knowledge foundation of systemic clinical theories including their perception of dysfunction, theory of change, assessment model and intervention skills. Furthermore, academic preparation facilitates the development of the clinical skills of assessment, developing hypotheses, case conceptualization, treatment planning and intervention.

### Fall I Semester

The primary educational and training goal of the first semester is to prepare students academically and clinically to provide competent care for clients beginning in the spring semester. Full-time students typically take 13 academic credits in their first semester comprised of four (4) academic courses and Practicum. The table below presents the Fall I schedule with a description of the academic preparation including the SLOs and CCs addressed by the courses.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **COURSE** | **TITLE** | **DESCRIPTION** | **SLO/Core Competency**  |
| HDFS-601 | Seminar in Human Development and Family Studies | Increases knowledge of MFT research on human development and develops the ability to conduct a literature review.  | **SLO** # 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 11**CC**: VII, XI  |
| HDFS-784 | Theoretical Foundations of Family Therapy | Provides foundational knowledge of the primary modern and post-modern systemic theories and models.  | **SLO** 6,7, 8**CC**: II, III, |
| HDFS-691 | Assessment in Marriage and Family Therapy  | Trains students to make accurate DSM-5 diagnoses, to conduct systemic assessments and make at-risk/safety evaluations | **SLO:** #8, 11, 12**CC:** I, II, III, VI, VIII |
| ETR-521  | Educational Statistics  | *Statistics* prepares students to read research and do statistical analysis for the research thesis option.  | **SLO: #**11**CC:** X |
| HDFS-639 | SMFT Practicum | New students participate in group supervision, trainings and teams on cases.  | **SLO:** #6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12**CC:** I, II, III, V, VIII, XI |

### Spring I Semester

In the Spring I semester, students begin to provide therapy in the Couple and Family Therapy Clinic (CFTC). Thus, its primary educational and training goal is to build on the academic foundation of systemic clinical theory and practice along with the development of core clinical skills through coursework and individual, group and live supervision. Training and supervision ensure the competent care of clients by beginning-level student-therapists. This semester has the heaviest academic load of the program, which is described in the table below.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **COURSE** | **TITLE** | **DESCRIPTION** | **SLO/Core Competency**  |
| HDFS-693 | Addiction and Substance Abuse in MFT **or** HDFS-785 Sex Therapy | Provides clinical education for the combined cohorts in the diagnosis and treatment of substance disorders.  | **SLO:** #7,8,10**CC**: I, II, III, V, VIII, IX |
| HDFS-695 | Approaches to Marriage and Family Therapy  | Provides an in-depth focus on Bowen Family Systems, Attachment and Trauma theory and practice.  | **SLO:** #6, 7, 8,12**CC**: I, II, III, IV, V, VII |
| HDFS-604 | Research Methods  | Trains students in the fundamentals of understanding, critically reading and designing clinical research | **SLO:** # 1, 2, 3, 11 **CC:** XI |
| HDFS-694 | Marriage and Family Therapy Techniques: Children and Adolescents  | Prepares students to assess, conceptualize, plan treatment and intervene with families and children grounded in systemic theories  | **SLO:** #6,7, 8, **CC:** I-V, VII-VIII, X |
| HDFS-639 | SMFT Practicum | Dyadic, group and live supervision for therapy with clients  | **SLO:**#6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12**CC:** I-VIII, X, XI |

### Summer Semester

The primary educational and training goals for the Summer Semester include growth in MFT clinical skills, smooth transition into Internship and an in-depth understanding of and ability to apply the AAMFT Code of Ethics. The Summer Semester schedule appears below:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **COURSE** | **TITLE** | **DESCRIPTION** | **SLO/Core Competency**  |
| HDFS-692 | Professional Issues In Family Therapy  | Addresses the AAMFT Code of Ethics, core ethical/professional issues and fosters ethical decision-making skills  | **SLO:** #10,11,12**CC**: VIII, X |
| HDFS-588 | Working with Ethnically Diverse Children and Families in the United Sates  | Prepares students to integrate cultural/contextual factors in therapy.  | **SLO:** #1, 3, 5, **CC**: VIII  |
| HDFS-639  | SMFT Practicum III  | Ongoing supervision for clinical work in the CFTC  | **SLO:** #6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12**CC:** I-VIII, X, XI |
| HDFS-633  | SMFT Internship in Community Agencies  | Additional supervised clinical experience in a community agency  | **SLO:** #1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, **CC:** I-VI, VIII-X |

## Rationale for Curriculum Sequence – Year II

In the second year of the program, the primary educational and training goal is to facilitate significant clinical growth through extensive clinical experience, supervision and advanced coursework. At the end of Year 2, students typically have completed all the requirements of the program and graduate as competent entry-level couple and family therapists.

### Fall II Semester

In the Fall II semester, students are engaged in four full days of supervised clinical practice through Internship and Practicum. Academically, the advanced MFT core course (*Therapy with Couples)* accompanies their supervised clinical experience.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **COURSE** | **TITLE** | **DESCRIPTION** | **SLO/Core Competency**  |
| HDFS-697 | Marriage and Family Therapy Strategies: Treatment of Couples  | Provides advanced education in the theory and practice of couple therapy  | **SLO:** #6, 7, 8,**CC**: II-V, VIII, XI  |
| HDFS-639  | SMFT Practicum IV  | Ongoing supervision for clinical work in the CFTC  | **SLO:** #6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12**CC:** I-VIII, X, XI |
| HDFS-633  | SMFT Internship in Community Agencies  | Additional supervised clinical experience in a community agency  | **SLO: #** 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, **CC:** I-VI, VIII-X |
| ComprehensiveExam | General Question  | A review of key human development and family literature on a relational topic with critical analysis and application of systems theory.  | **SLO:** #1, 2, 3, 4, 5**CC:** VII, XI |
| Comprehensive Exam  | Research Question | A critical analysis of a problematic research project demonstrating a sound knowledge of research methods.  | **SLO:** #11**CC:** XI |
| Comprehensive Exam  | Special Question | A comprehensive relational case conceptualization that includes assessment, treatment planning and intervention skills.  | **SLO: #**6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12**CC:** II-V, VII-VIII,  |

### Spring II Semester

The main goal of the final semester of the program is to foster the advanced development of clinical competence of the therapeutic skills, including MFT core competencies, necessary to fulfill the SMFT Student Learning Outcomes and to graduate as strong entry-level couple and family therapists. Students **must** take **their elective** this semester if the requirement as not been met.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **COURSE** | **TITLE** | **DESCRIPTION** | **SLO/Core Competency**  |
| HDFS-785 | Sex Therapy **or** HDFS-693 (Substance Abuse in MFT)  | Provides clinical education and training in the diagnosis and treatment of sexual disorders. | **SLO:** #6, 7, 8, 9, 10 **CC**: I-V, VII-VIII, X (Sex Therapy) |
| HDFS-639  | SMFT Practicum III  | Ongoing supervision for clinical work in the CFTC  | **SLO:** #6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12**CC:** I-VIII, X, XI |
| HDFS-633  | SMFT Internship in Community Agencies  | Additional supervised clinical experience in a community agency  | **SLO:** #1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10**CC:** I-VI, VIII-X |

## Integrative Experience

The integrative experience is an educational/clinical experience or capstone project that demonstrates that students have integrated the educational knowledge and clinical skills that fulfills the SLOs and shows readiness for graduation and employment as an MFT. The *Special Question* of the Comprehensive Exams and the *Theory of Change* papers and presentations are the integrative experiences for the SMFT Program.

### Comprehensive Exam

The Comprehensive Exam, which has 3 questions, is usually taken in the Fall Semester of the second year of the program. The General and Research Questions are primarily designed to satisfy the Human Development and Family Sciences (HDFS) Area, which houses the SMFT Program. These exams do, however, address SLO #1 (Human Development) and SLO #11 (Research) for the SMFT Program. Each exam is graded by two HDFS faculty on a Pass/Fail basis. The Special Question is designed and graded by SMFT faculty. If the faculty are divided on passing the student, a third reader is assigned. If students fail one Comprehensive Exam, they are permitted to remediate that exam in the Fall Semester. When a student fails two or more of the exams, they must retake the failed examinations in the Spring Semester.

### Theory of Change Papers

The Theory of Change paper is an evolving document due at two points in the program, Practicum III and Practicum V. The Theory of Change papers and presentations are designed to demonstrate the student progress on clinical developmental markers and SLOs as well as readiness for an entry-level position as a Marriage and Family Therapist. A clear understanding of and confidence in the therapist’s style of facilitating change with clients, firmly grounded in sound systemic theory, is vital to high quality clinical service. Guidelines for the papers may be found in Appendix ET4a and 4b of the Student Handbook. The Theory of Change papers require students to reflect on what role the following key aspects of therapeutic change plays in their plays in their personal style of facilitating change:

* ***Therapeutic Relationship***: Common factors research has identified the quality of the therapist-client relationship has a primary predictor of successful therapy (Sprinkle et al., 2009). In addition, does the therapist use the relationship to facilitate change?
* ***Client Interactions:*** How does the therapist promote growth and change through effective interactions with clients in sessions? In relational therapy, what role does facilitation of effectual client communication and interactions play in the process of change?
* ***Assessment:*** What are the key elements of the therapist’s assessment protocol? How does the therapist use assessment in the process of change?
* ***Conceptualization to Treatment Plan***: How does the therapist use conceptualization to develop a plan for facilitating change?
* ***Intentionality and Intervention***: How does the therapist implement their plan in therapy? What interventions help clients to change?
* ***Theoretical Orientation****:* Common factors research also has found that effective therapists have a clear theoretical foundation that they understand at a depth level and have confidence in its ability to help clients successfully meet their goals (citation). Each MFT theory has a specific theory of change that can assist the student in the development of their personal theory of change. The Theory of Change paper and presentation process strives to assist students in identifying, understanding and skillfully implementing the theory(s) that is the optimal fit for their therapeutic style.

# Clinical Requirements

## Foundational Practice Component: Clinical Training

Conducting therapy under close supervision is the core of clinical training since students grow primarily through the combination of experience, reflection and guidance. In the SMFT Program, students gain supervised clinical experience through Practicum (HDFS-639) and Internship (HDFS-633). Students participate in *Practicum* all five semesters in the program including 4 semesters providing therapy in the CFTC at NIU under the supervision of SMFT faculty or their designee. In Semesters III-V, students also provide services through an *Internship* in a community agency under the supervision of qualified agency clinician. Students accrue a minimum of 500 client contact hours comprised of 200 or more relational hours. A maximum of 100 reflecting team hours may be used to meet the 500-hour experience requirement. No more than 50% of clinical hours (excluding teaming/alternative hours) can be accrued from conducting teletherapy. Students need to have a minimum of 100 supervision hours with an AAMFT Approved Supervisor or AAMFT Supervisor Candidate. At least 50 of the supervision hours must be individual hours (no more than 2 students). Students are required to have a minimum of 50 hours of supervision utilizing *observable data* (live or recordings).

## Clinical Supervision Philosophy

The clinical supervision in Practicum and Internship provides guidance on client cases to ensure the competent treatment of CFTC and agency clients and facilitates student growth through feedback and recommendations regarding the assessment, conceptualization, treatment planning and intervention of their cases. Supervision also focuses beyond competent care of clients to therapist development of the requisite skills and confidence necessary to graduate as a strong entry level clinician and to have a successful career as a licensed MFT. The following conceptual model guides the developmental process:

**Intuitive Caring:** The innate abilities of the therapist in early development. In later development, the capacity to use empathy, soothing and intuition when the therapist is stuck and/or reached the limits of knowledge/skills.

**Self-Conscious:** In early development, the therapist is often impaired by excessive focus on the self (e.g. anxiety, lack of confidence). In later development, the therapist is aware that he/she is stuck in the therapy with a particular client or on specific clinical issues. The learning process is primarily reflective in nature. In early sessions, the novice therapist uses basic relationship and counseling skills to interact effectively with clients. In between sessions, reflection is employed to assess, conceptualize and plan treatment through supervision, study and review of recorded sessions.

**Mindful Proficiency:** The therapist is moving beyond self-consciousness to the conscious use of beginning interventions. In early development, the therapist has restored confidence in basic relational skills and is consciously implementing strategies identified in supervision. In later development, the therapist is moving beyond the impasse with a specific client(s) by employing new interventions and/or strategies developed through supervision, training and/or new knowledge. The therapist begins to integrate systemic clinical theory into their assessment, conceptualization, treatment planning and intervention.

**Intentional Confident:** The therapist is primarily client- and treatment-focused; confident, clear, planful and intentional in their clinical work. While the therapist continues to use supervision and reflection, they are showing signs of more awareness and responsiveness to dynamics while they are occurring. Assessment, conceptualization and treatment is firmly rooted in the therapist’s theory and consciously implement the therapist’s emerging theory of change. The therapist needs supervision on more sophisticated aspects of therapy or more challenging client issues.

**Integration:** The therapist has formed their personal therapeutic style built on a sound theoretical foundation and clear theory of change. The therapist is more acutely aware of dynamics in sessions and able to process information to formulate hypotheses in session. The therapist is able to choose how to intervene during therapeutic interactions. Through experience, the therapist has developed a repertoire of responses and interventions that are employed automatically. The therapist is able to reflect on their clinical work and develop alternative strategies for impasses and difficult cases.

Thus, the model seeks to promote clinician growth from instincts, relationship skills and compassion to effective basic counseling skills and strong therapeutic relationships to the skillful ability to promote change through confidence, advanced clinical skills, intentionality and heightened in-session awareness firmly grounded in systemic theory. The developmental model guides the clinical skill-level expectations as well as the evaluation of students for each semester of Practicum and Internship. In contrast to linear developmental models, the recursive quality of this model communicates the need for lifelong attention to growth as an MFT.

# Practicum (HDFS-639) Policy and Procedures

Students are enrolled in a Practicum course all five semesters of the program. In *Practicum,* students work in the CFTC two (2) days per week providing client services and completing client documentation. One of the Clinic days is designated as Practicum Day where students receive supervision in addition to conducting sessions with clients. Each Practicum is led by a core SMFT faculty member or their designee who is an AAMFT Approved Supervisor or Supervisor Candidate. The Practicum Supervisor provides individual/dyadic, group and live supervision on a weekly basis. Every session conducted in the CFTC is recorded. These recordings are typically reviewed in group supervision and frequently in individual/dyadic sessions. Students are required to have a minimum of 50 hours of supervision utilizing *observable data* (live or recordings).

## Practicum I

Practicum I (Fall I) is a **1-credit** course that begins in the third week of classes. Its primary training goal is to prepare students for clinical work with clients in their second semester. It is comprised of: a) Orientation Trainings, b) Teaming, c) Basic Skills Training and d) Participation in weekly group supervision. Students are expected to complete a basic skills practice session, team for 50 hours and pass a Readiness Assessment to begin clinical work with clients in the CFTC in the Spring Semester.

## Orientation Trainings

First-year students participate in several orientation sessions as part of their preparation to see clients in the CFTC. Orientation includes a) CFTC Policies and Procedures; b) Confidentiality; c) Basic Skills; d) Teaming Policies and e) Considering Client’s Cultural Context

## Treatment Team Policies

In their first semester, students begin Teaming on several cases. Treatment Team members comprise a reflecting team by observing therapy sessions from behind the mirror then consulting with the therapist regarding treatment for a **minimum of 5-10 minutes** following the session. Team members may actively keep case notes and contribute to case discussions in group and live supervision. The policies for treatment team participation include:

1. Prior to teaming on cases, students must review and sign the Teaming Agreement in the Student Handbook (ET2) and complete a training on confidentiality.
2. Each student is assigned two teaming cases on their first day of Practicum, which starts the third week of classes. Three new cases will be added by October 1st and again by October 15th, creating a caseload of eight for the semester. The caseload will be a mixture of cases assigned by the clinic director and ones that are selected by the student. **All teaming cases will be approved by the clinic director.**
3. Students will team weekly on their caseload through the termination of a case.
4. When a team member has an excused absence, they must watch the digital recording **before the next live session**. Watching recording in lieu of live sessions should occur sparingly.
5. Students are expected to maintain a full caseload. If a client regularly misses sessions or moves to a new day, the case may be dropped to team on another case at the same time **with the permission of their supervisor***.* The student will communicate caseload changes to the clinic director and GA.
6. To qualify for Readiness Assessment, first-semester students need to accumulate 50 teaming hours.
7. Students may count a maximum of 100 teaming hours toward the 500 clinical hours required for graduation. After reaching 50 teaming hours and completing the first semester, students typically continue teaming for the remainder of the program strategically selecting cases with the clinic director and GA.
8. Students will record their teaming hours weekly on the Therapist Log Excel Spreadsheet.

## Basic Skills Practice Session

Each first-semester student conducts a 50-minute practice counseling session recorded in the CFTC. The mock session is an initial session with an individual client. The primary foci of the evaluation of the session include:

* Joining effectively with the client
* Demonstrating active listening
* Using a repertoire of responses that communicate effective listening
* Gathering good information
* Creating sustained interactions the focus on an important topic for several minutes.

Each student will receive detailed feedback that identifies strengths and growing edges as well as effective responses.

## Readiness Assessment

The Readiness Assessment is conducted by the Practicum Supervisor and is comprised of:

* Evaluation of participation in supervision and teaming
* Skills displayed in three practice sessions
* Feedback on performance in HDFS-691 (diagnostic/assessment skills) and HDFS-784 (theoretical understanding). A copy of the Readiness Assessment may be found in Appendix ET3 of the Student Handbook.

## Practicums II-V

Practicum II (Spring I) is a 2-credit hour course where students begin to see clients in the CFTC and receive clinical supervision after passing the Readiness Assessment and completing additional clinical orientation. Students continue to provide therapy, receive supervision and participate in practicum for the remaining three semesters (Practicums III-V). Practicums III-V are 3 credit hour courses. Practicum runs from 2 p.m. to 8 p.m. The policies and procedures of Practicum are described in the following sections.

### Student-Therapist Expectations

The Student-Therapist (ST) provides individual, couple and family therapy over four semesters in the SMFT Program under the mentorship of faculty supervisors. The ST is available in the Clinic for two days and 16 hours per week including late afternoon/early evening hours each day. The ST carries an average caseload of 8-10 clients and is responsible for the timely completion of clinical documentation for each client. On occasion, additional hours may be required to complete paperwork.

### Supervision

Students receive an hour of individual/dyadic and group supervision weekly and frequent live supervision from their Practicum Supervisor. In crises or perplexing situations, supervision is provided by the On-Call Supervisor, an SMFT faculty member designated to cover that Clinic on that day. Faculty supervisors are available for impromptu supervision as needed when on campus. Every Friday, the Student-Therapist will log their supervision hours into the Therapist Log Excel Spreadsheet.

### Assignment of Clients

The assignment of clients is coordinated by the clinic director using these guidelines:

1. Clients are typically assigned to a therapist by the Intake Therapist following the intake procedure delineated in the **CFTC Policy and Procedures Manual**.
2. First-year therapists will be assigned their first clients by the clinic director in late January. The initial clients will be seen by the therapist on their Practicum day. The client caseload will build slowly to a maximum of 12 clients over the remainder of the first semester.
3. In the Spring Semester, second-year therapists are the priority for the assignment of relational cases until spring break (or later if necessary) to fulfill graduation requirements for relational hours. When needed, the clinic director will determine the order in which therapists are assigned relational cases.
4. After spring break, the majority of new intakes are assigned to first-year therapists.
5. With the permission of their supervisor, first-year students may function as a co-therapist on new relational cases with the expectation that he/she would continue as the solo therapist after the graduation of the second-year therapist.
6. As their caseload builds in the Spring Semester, first-year students will see clients on a second day in the Clinic. The clinic director will create the therapist schedule in collaboration with students and the Clinic GA.

### The Spring Transition

In March of the spring semester, second-year therapists begin the termination process with clients by:

1. Determining with each client whether they would like to terminate therapy or transition to another therapist to continue therapy after the graduation of their therapist.
2. The therapist will notify the clinic director and their Supervisor about client decisions.
3. A new therapist will be assigned to clients who opt to transition in conjunction with the Supervisor.
4. When possible, the transition to a new therapist should be a three-session process comprised of the new therapist:
	* Watches the first two sessions behind the mirror
	* Is introduced to the client(s) at the end of the second session
	* Is a co-therapist in the third session taking the lead with the support of the terminating therapist.
5. Once the case is transitioned to the first-year therapist, the outgoing therapist will team on the case until graduation to provide support and guidance for the new therapist.
6. All transitions must be completed by finals’ week. During finals’ week, graduating students are expected to collect their personal belongings, complete all paperwork and return keys to the Clinic.
7. In order to graduate, all Student-Therapists will complete the paperwork due to the clinic director and required to close or transition all client files. The graduating student will ensure that all paperwork is reviewed by the clinic director.
8. When first year therapists begin seeing cases independently of second year therapists, each practicum supervisor will provide at least an hour of supervision each week for first year therapists.

### Evaluations

Students are evaluated by their Practicum Supervisor at the end of each semester for Practicums II-V. The evaluation process includes a written evaluation by the supervisor, written evaluation by the student and face-to-face review of the evaluations. The written evaluations are designed to assess developmental progress, strengths and growth areas. It is comprised of narrative comments and ratings on key items using a 5-point Likert scale. Student forms for self-evaluation appear in Appendix ET5a-d while supervisor forms for Practicum Evaluation appear in ET8a-c of the Student Handbook.

The evaluation process is goal-focused and devised to promote development growth in the competency of the student-therapist. Each Practicum has specific developmental goals for the cohort described in the syllabus. In addition, individual goals are established for the next semester by the student and supervisor in the evaluation process. Any “2” ratings should become a learning goal for the next semester.

Occasionally, a serious problem with clinical competency and/or skill development emerges during the semester or in the evaluation process. This problem may be a critical incident or a persistent difficulty in client sessions, which lead to a “1” rating in the evaluation. In these instances, a detailed plan must be created with SMFT faculty to strengthen the competency and/or to rectify the critical incident. Similarly, serious violations of CFTC policy and procedures (e.g. breaking confidentiality) necessitates disciplinary action from SMFT faculty that may include a) meeting with faculty; b) written warning; c) a remediation plan; d) failing practicum; or e) dismissal from the program.

## Internship (HDFS-633) Policy and Procedures

In addition to the clinical days in the CFTC, students will begin an off-campus internship in the summer that will continue through the Fall II and Spring II semesters. The internship enables students to obtain the 500 clinical hours for graduation and provides valuable experience in an agency setting. It also can be an opportunity to work with a specific population. Students typically commit 16 hours over two days to provide client services at their internship site. The clinic director has primary responsibility in coordinating the placement process and monitoring the performance of the student and the site during internship.

### Internship Sites

The SMFT Program has approved several agencies in the community as internship sites. Many of the sites have worked with our students for several years. Each agency interacts regularly with the CFTC and has agreed to meet SMFT training expectations including a) individual and relational hours; b) weekly supervision and c) clinical evaluations of students. In turn, students are expected to comply with agency policy and procedures regarding case documentation, client services, confidentiality and crisis management. Internship sites must provide a minimum of one hour of supervision per week from an on-site clinical supervisor who is an independently licensed mental health professional in the state of Illinois.

### Placement Process

Students are placed in an internship site through the following process:

1. An Internship Luncheon is held annually in November on campus. Prior to the luncheon, students are provided with information about each agency providing an internship. A representative from each agency or facility will give a brief summary of the clinical services and the opportunities for interns at their site. Students then sit down one-on-one with agency personnel to discuss the agency’s services and approach to training. Students use this experience to determine their preferred internship sites.
2. In the first week of December, students apply to the preferred internship sites by mailing an application letter and resume to the site supervisor. The clinic director is a resource for assistance with letters and resumes.
3. Agencies will contact students to schedule interviews, which usually take place in early January. Students are encouraged to bring their resumes to interviews.
4. Agencies typically extend an offer to students in mid-to-late January. Placements are coordinated by the clinic director. Students usually will be notified of their official placements by the end of January. If a student encounters a problem with placement, the clinic director will work with them until a site is finalized.
5. On occasion, a student may wish to find an alternative internship site for personal reasons or to work with a specific client population. In these instances, the student must begin working with the clinic director to find an internship site in **October of fall I**.

### Beginning Internship

Early in the spring semester, an agreement must be made between the student and the on-site internship supervisor regarding work hours and days. Required hours vary among internship sites. The Student Intern usually commits 16 hours over two days to provide client services at their site. Students should use caution in scheduling excessive hours at internship in order to meet all of the program requirements for graduation.

1. In scheduling internship, the student will keep in mind the summer schedule for HDFS-639 (Monday or Tuesday) and HDFS-692. The internship schedule will be communicated to and approved by the clinic director. All approved internship sites have agreed to provide eight or more hours of clinical contact on weekly basis.
2. At the beginning of internship, the Site Supervisor and the Student Intern will sign the SMFT Internship Agreement provided by the clinic director and return it to the clinic director.
3. The Site Supervisor and the Student Intern will complete a Learning Contract (Appendix ET6 of the Student Handbook) within one month of beginning the internship and return it to the clinic director.
4. The Student Intern will sign the Internship Learning Contract and Agreement (Appendix ET6 and ET7 in Student Handbook) required by NIU and give this signed form to their SMFT supervisor prior to beginning the internship. When an agency requires its own agreement document, it is the agency’s responsibility to provide it.
5. Malpractice insurance is provided by NIU. If a student wishes to augment the NIU insurance, Student Members of AAMFT are eligible to purchase inexpensive malpractice insurance.
6. The Student Intern is registered for 1 credit of HDFS-633 typically for three semesters (summer, fall II, spring II). Three credits of HDFS-633 are required for graduation.

### During Internship

* The Student Intern is expected to provide an average of 8 or more clinical hours weekly throughout their internship. Interns will conduct themselves in a professional manner at the Internships site.
* Student Interns will engage clients in different phases of the therapy process. This engagement might include telephone conversations, intake interviews, diagnosis and assessment, treatment planning, implementing interventions, assessing outcomes and making appropriate terminations or referrals.
* The clinical work of the Student Intern will be supervised by the Site Supervisor. The Supervisor will provide one hour of supervision per week. This supervision may be in an individual or group format and may involve case review, live observation, or video review.
* Student Interns will comply with agency policies and procedures including paperwork requirements, confidentiality policies and emergency/crisis procedures. They will also engage in case management activities such as case notes and record-keeping, staff meetings, travel, administrative activities, consultation with appropriate community members, professionals or agencies and case conferencing.
* After every month, students are required to have their internship supervisor review and sign off on their hours. Students will give the signed copy to the Program GA to place in the student’s file.
* The student will document the clinical and supervision hours at internship weekly on the Therapist Log Excel Spreadsheet.
* The clinical hours obtained at Internship count toward the 500 hours required for graduation.
* At the beginning of each semester, the Site Supervisor and the Intern will receive a copy of the HDFS-633 syllabus, which includes the SMFT Program’s development goals for each Intern.

### Evaluation

At the end of each semester, the clinic director will send the SMFT Intern Evaluation Form electronically to the Site Supervisor **(**Appendix ET8a-c in the Student Handbook) and notify the Intern to complete the Student Evaluation Form (Appendices ET9a-c in the Student Handbook). The evaluation process includes a) written evaluation by the supervisor; b) written evaluation by the student and: c) face-to-face review of the evaluations.

The written evaluations are designed to identify student strengths and growth areas and to assess progress on learning goals. These developmental goals are comprised of SMFT Program goals, communicated through the HDFS-633 syllabus and individualized goals established with the Site Supervisor at the beginning of each semester. Any “2” ratings should become a learning goal for the next semester.

The Site Supervisor will report a serious problem with clinical competency, skill development or professional comportment to the clinic director. In these instances, a detailed plan must be created with the internship site to strengthen the competency and/or to rectify professional conduct. Serious violations may result in disciplinary action including dismissal from the program.

### At the End of the Internship Period

The intern will complete the Intern's Evaluation of Internship Site form (Appendix ET10 in the Student Handbook) and submit it to their practicum supervisor before the end of the spring semester. This form will be kept on file for future students to familiarize them with the internship sites.

## CFTC Termination Tasks

The following tasks are required to complete and graduate from the program. The clinic director oversees the following CFTC termination tasks of the graduating cohort:

### Closing Case Files

* Complete all client paperwork listed from the April chart audit and have your supervisor sign off that everything has been completed.
* All charts will have a Transition summary or Termination summary. The sole exception is when you have been a co-therapist with a 1st year student. In lieu of a summary, the Progress Note should document your last session as a co-therapist.
* When you are waiting for termination research feedback, put a note with this information in the chart in Titanium so that the chart can be closed but not filed until research feedback can be filed in the chart.
* Shred any client-related material not in the chart, such as process notes or genograms.

### Evaluations and Documentation of Hours

* Practicum evaluations have to be completed, reviewed and signed by you and your supervisor.
* Internship evaluations have to be completed, reviewed and signed by you and your supervisor.
* The Student Evaluation of Internship Form (Appendix ET10 in the Student Handbook) needs to be completed and submitted to the clinic director at checkout.
* Document in the Therapist Hours Log approved clinical and supervision hours for Practicum and Internship. Each Student Therapist will be provided with a Final Clinic and Supervision Report by the Program GA that documents their clinical and supervision hours accrued in the program.

### Check-Out

Each graduating student will meet with the clinic director to:

* Verify the closing of all clinical charts with completed documentation.
* Provide Practicum and Internship evaluations including the Intern’s evaluation of the site (ET10 in the Student Handbook).
* Turn in the CFTC key.
* Verify the final documentation of clinical and supervision hours.

# Licensure Information: Licensing and Portability

The SMFT Program prepares students to become an Illinois Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT). The first step towards Illinois licensure is obtaining an Associate MFT license (AMFT), which validates the education and training of the applicant. At graduation, SMFT students are strongly encouraged to apply immediately for the AMFT license including the completion of forms that require the validation of the program.

The second step for licensure is to accrue supervised clinical hours for a minimum of two years and pass a national licensing exam. The Illinois AMFT usually enables the graduate to take the national exam prior to completing their supervised clinical hours.

As a COAMFTE-accredited program, the state of Illinois automatically accepts the education and training of the graduates of the SMFT Program. The Student Handbook maps how the program meets the educational and training (300 direct contact hours) requirements of the Illinois LMFT.

While most states have standard academic and training expectations for an LMFT, there are states with requirements that are not met by the SMFT Program. As a result, students who are planning or considering obtaining a license outside of Illinois are **strongly encouraged** to consult with the Program Director in the first semester of the program to develop a plan for meeting the license requirements of that state. The [licensing requirements of all 50 states may be found on the SMFT website](https://www.chhs.niu.edu/facs/programs/human-development/marriage-family-therapy/documents.shtml)to assist applicants and current students in determining the portability of their education and training at NIU.

# Program Effectiveness

The SMFT Program collects data each semester to evaluate student development as a competent marriage and family therapists and their progress on the Student Learning Outcomes in a variety of ways. This data is reviewed by the faculty to evaluate the effectiveness of the educational and training program and to identify significant educational gaps or training challenges. This evaluation process may lead to permanent program improvements or a unique educational/training plan for a cohort designed to address a specific educational/training growth area.

## Educational Data

Data on student progress is collected each semester through university course evaluation forms, core course assignments, integrative experiences and evaluation of progress on the Student Learning Outcomes and Course Learning Outcomes over the two years of the program. The evaluation of student progress assesses growth in cognitive understanding of systemic theory and effective treatment, development of clinical skills, assessment, conceptualization, treatment planning and intervention with clients.

The SMFT faculty strive to collect and evaluate data at both the macro and micro level. At the *macro* level, aggregate data as a cohort is collected on student performance. This data enables faculty to determine the general effectiveness of the program’s education and training while seeking to identify improvements for the program. At the **micro** level, several of the assessment instruments enable the faculty to ascertain individual students who are struggling in specific ways with cognitive understanding and/or skill development. This enables faculty and supervisors to work with the student to increase competency and to meet developmental markers.

### Course Assignment(s)

Each core course of the SMFT Program has a key assignment(s) that demonstrates the student’s grasp of the course material and their development of essential clinical skills. This designated course assignment addresses one or more Course (CLO) and Student (SLO) Learning Outcomes. Thus, these key assignments assess the progress of the cohort (macro level) and that of individual students (micro level). These course assignments used for assessment with the CLOs and SLOs are delineated in the chart below:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **COURSE** | **SEMESTER** | **ASSIGNMENT(s)** | **CLO** | **SLO** |
| HDFS-601 | Fall 1 | HDFS Literature Review | CLO#1-5 | # 1,2,3,4 |
| HDFS-691 | Fall 1 | DSM-5 Exams (2)Systemic Assessment PaperAssessment Mock SessionAt-Risk Mock Session | CLO#1, 2CLO#3,4CLO #4CLO #5 | #11,12#11, 12#8,11, 12#8,11, 12 |
| HDFS-784 | Fall 1 | Major Paper  | CLO#1-4 | #2, #3 |
| HDFS-697 | Fall 2 | Couple Dynamic Analysis Paper  | CLO#1, 2, 4, 5 | #7, #8 |
| HDFS-604 | Spring 1 | Exams (2); Research Proposal | CLO #1-3 | #1, 2, 3  |
| HDFS-693 | Alt. Spring | Case Conceptualization #1Case Conceptualization #2  | CLO #2-4CLO#3-7 | #7, 8#7, 8 |
| HDFS-694 | Spring 1 | Practice Treatment Plans (3)Case ConceptualizationExam | CLO#1, 3, 8 CLO#1-3, 8CLO#1-3, 6, 8 | #6-8#6-8#6-8 |
| HDFS-695 | Spring 1 | Conceptualization and Presentation  | CLO#1-4 | #6-8 |
| HDFS-785 | Alt. Spring | Assessment Assignment Treatment Planning Assignment  | CLO#2-3CLO#1-5 | #8#6-8 |
| HDFS-692 | Summer | ExamResearch Paper | CLO#1-4CLO#1, 3 | #8, 12#12 |

The Cohort is expected to average a “B” (83%) or better on the designated assignments including 80% of the students earning a “B” or better.

### SLO-CLO Rubric Evaluations

In addition to the designated course assignment(s), the course professor also evaluates student progress on the CLOs using a 5-point Likert Scale. This evaluation is designed not only to assess achievement in the course but also to evaluate student progress on developmental markers for clinical competency. Each rating point on the Likert Scale is specifically defined by the developmental goals of the semester. For instance, the rating scale for first semester courses is shaped by the goal of preparing students to provide therapy in the CFT Clinic the next semester, while the Likert Scale for Spring II semester is fashioned by the competency expectations of an entry-level professional MFT. The Cohort is expected to average a “3” or above. An aggregate score below 3.0 signifies that the Cohort has not met minimum expectations for the CLO indicating that additional education/training is needed for this Cohort and/or that a program improvement may be required.

### Student CLO Evaluations

At the end of the semester, SMFT students complete a self-evaluation of their mastery of the CLOs for each core course of the program. The surveys are completed anonymously using Qualtrics, which produces aggregate data on student confidence regarding the growth of their foundation of clinical knowledge and skills. In the Assessment Process, the faculty reviews the aggregate self-evaluation data comparing it with the faculty evaluation of the students. This aggregate data dovetails effectively with the faculty SLO-CLO Rubric Evaluation for the course by communicating any lack of confidence in skill development and/or lack of understanding of specific course material. This assessment, then, enables faculty to focus on the deficient areas in future courses and/or to strengthen the course for future cohorts. Each course has a student CLO evaluation template. The questions can be modified each year to reflect changes in the CLOs and/or course material before creating the Qualtrics survey.

### Training Data

The SMFT Program also gathers data to assess student development as a clinician in Practicum and Internship including their progress on the SLOs of the program. Proficiency with all seven of the SMFT learning outcomes is necessary for graduation as a competent entry-level practitioner of marriage and family therapy eligible for licensure with two years of post-masters’ supervised clinical experience.

#### Theory of Change Papers and Presentations

The Theory of Change papers and presentations described above occur in the context of Practicum. Thus, this Integrative Experience is one major way that the clinical development of students is assessed throughout the program.

#### Readiness Assessment

The Readiness Assessment, described above, provides data for faculty review both the preparation of the first-semester cohort and each individual student to serve clients in the CFTC. The assessment often identifies individual learning goals for the next semester for each student. In addition to the assessment items, the faculty may review student performance on the three mock sessions including the a) basic skills session; b) initial relational session and c) suicide risk assessment.

#### Practicum and Internship Evaluations: Supervisors

SMFT students are evaluated by their Practicum and Internship supervisors at the end of each semester. The evaluation items are designed to assess student progress with clinical skills and professionalism. These items also are connected to mastery of key components of each SLO. Students are evaluated on a 5-Point Likert Scale with the ratings based on the developmental expectations of the specific Practicum Semester. Evaluations can be found in the Appendix ET5a-d in the Student Handbook.

#### Practicum and Internship Evaluations: Students

Student-Therapists do a self-evaluation for both their practicum and internship experiences each semester using an instrument with similar items as the supervisor evaluations. The data is collected using the same format as the supervisor data. The faculty review, then, has supervisor and student data for a thorough evaluation of the clinical performance of student-therapists each semester. Evaluations can be found in the Appendix ET8a-c in the Student Handbook.

#### CFTC Documentation

The documentation protocol of the CFT Clinic is designed not only to meet professional standards but also as a vital training experience for the student therapists. The documentation is reviewed regularly by Practicum supervisors and the clinic director ensuring competence with assessment, conceptualization, treatment planning, strategic intervention and evaluation of progress.

# Assessment Process and Program Improvement

The assessment process of program effectiveness and program improvement is diagramed below:

## Data Gathering and Faculty Review

The educational and training aggregate data described above is gathered at the end of each semester. In the Spring Semester, the Fall Semester data is reviewed by the faculty in one or more meetings to assess learning and training effectiveness as well as progress toward Student Learning Outcomes. Spring and Summer Semesters aggregate data is typically reviewed early in the Fall Semester. Concerns and/or learning issues raised by the macro-level analysis of the aggregate cohort data may create the need for an improvement in the program. This program improvement may be an adjustment in the education and training of the specific cohort for the remainder of the program or may lead to adapting program improvements, such as course modifications, the addition of new curriculum and/or new supervision approaches. The faculty review also operates at the micro-level using the educational and training data to identify students who may be struggling academically and/or clinically as well as important growing edges for trainees.

When a program improvement(s) is identified by the faculty review, a plan is developed for implementation of the program improvement. This may take the form of an action plan for strengthening the education/training of a specific cohort in the next semester or a long-range plan to make a permanent improvement in the SMFT Program. Program improvements may take 12-24 months to implement fully.

### Pilot Projects

The SMFT Program faculty often begin implementation of a program improvement by designing a Pilot Project to test the viability of planned improvement. The Pilot Project implements the program improvement for one or more semesters. After this test period, SMFT faculty and students evaluate the effectiveness of the program improvement. This evaluation typically results in recommendations that strengthen the new educational/training method. Following this review, the improvement is integrated into the SMFT curriculum and/or training process.

### Communities of Interest

Communities of Interest are outside individuals or groups that can provide valuable input for the Program. This is an additional way that can assist in the evaluation of program effectiveness and result in program improvements. Currently, the Communities of Interest for the SMFT Program are:

* **Current students**
* **SMFT alumni**
* **NIU administration** (school chair, area coordinator, college dean and associate deans, Provost’s Office).
* **Internship supervisors**
* **Clients of the CFTC**
* **Employers of SMFT graduates**

Surveys are sent to the Communities of Interest twice a year in January and June. Program surveys the Communities of Interest for feedback on program effectiveness and recommendations for program improvements. SMFT faculty conduct an annual review of the aggregate data from these surveys. Like the educational/training data assessment, this review may lead to program improvements.

### Alumni

Ongoing contact with and input from our alumni is invaluable for the SMFT Program. The program endeavors to maintain communication with alumni through:

* Alumni Facebook page
* Periodic Alumni Newsletter
* CEU opportunities
* Low-cost supervision and AAMFT Supervisor’s training
* Gathering data on passing the national exam, licensing and clinical practice

# NIU and SMFT Policies

## Diversity and Non-discrimination Policies

Northern Illinois University celebrates diversity in all its forms and strives to create a learning environment that enables students to understand and accept our differences. View the [NIU diversity statement](https://www.niu.edu/diversity/about/index.shtml). Faculty receive annual Title IX training and training in diversity periodically.

The SMFT Program upholds the NIU Mission to value “A Community of diverse people, ideas, services and scholarly endeavors in a climate of respect for the intrinsic dignity of each individual” with an intentional consideration of contextual factors such as race, age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, disability, health status, religion, spirituality, political beliefs and/or nation of origin. It is the intention of the faculty and supervisors to promote an atmosphere in the SMFT Program and at the CFTC in which all students are given equal respect and opportunity as well as to promote dialogue, understanding and acceptance of the diversity of students, faculty and clients. The SMFT program strives to recruit and train students from various cultural backgrounds.

The CFTC provides culturally informed, affordable therapy to diverse and often underserved communities. Therefore, [non-discrimination](https://www.niu.edu/policies/policy-documents/nondiscrimination-harassment-policy.shtml) is a vital component of the services provided to clients. Intentional consideration of client’s cultural context is an essential aspect of the training process reflected in SLO #5 and SLO #10 and Program Goal #4.

Intentional consideration of cultural context, such as race, age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, disability, health status, religion, spirituality, political beliefs and/or nation of origin and the practice of anti-discrimination applies to all practices of the SMFT Program including:

* Recruitment of students
* Admission of students
* Grading/assessment and graduation of students
* Hiring of faculty
* Recruitment of internship supervisors
* Complaints and grievances

## Admission Process

### Application Process

The priority deadline for applications to the Fall Cohort is January 15. Applications are submitted to the [Graduate School](https://www.niu.edu/grad/academics/masters/marriage-family-therapy.shtml). Applications are comprised of the following components:

* Graduate School application
* Unofficial Transcripts
* Three Letters of Recommendation
* Statement of Purpose
* Current Resume

The SMFT website provides [guidelines for the application process](https://www.chhs.niu.edu/facs/programs/human-development/marriage-family-therapy/admissions.shtml) and its components and all inquiries about the program receive a copy of the application instructions. The program continues to accept and consider applications after the priority deadline until the cohort is full. Cohorts typically range from 12-15 students.

An Interview Day or individual interviews may be scheduled with applicants that did not meet the priority deadline. The same decision-making process will be followed for candidates who were not part of the initial review and interview process.

### Decision-Making Process

All applications are reviewed by SMFT faculty. Priority applications are reviewed no later than the end of January. Qualified candidates are invited to participate in an Interview Day typically conducted during the last week of February. Interview Days are comprised of:

* Introduction to the program
* Individual Interviews with all SMFT faculty and the program graduate assistant
* Q&A with current students
* Group interview

The interview days seek to determine if a candidate has the emotional maturity, motivation and inter-personal skills to provide therapy to clients, manage the stress of an intensive graduate program and relate well with the cohort. Following the interview days, SMFT faculty determine if a candidate is a good fit for the program and rank the candidates.

HDFS faculty then review the applications of candidates selected by the SMFT faculty providing a 0-5 rating for GPA, GRE, Statement of Purpose and Letters of Recommendation. This review typically supports the decisions of the SMFT faculty.

In early March, candidates are notified of their acceptance or non-acceptance into the program. Some acceptable candidates may be put on a waiting list at that time. Candidates accepted by the program are required to confirm or reject the acceptance by March 31. When the program receives rejections of our invitation, waiting list candidates are extended offers.

### Admission Process

The SMFT Program Director notifies the Graduate School of all admission decisions through OnBase. When a student accepts our offer, the Graduate School sends an email communication that starts the onboarding process to the Graduate School at NIU. The SMFT Program Director sends each member of the new cohort an official admission letter that includes any deficiencies that are required to be completed. The deficiencies are determined by the HDFS Area Coordinator.

The SMFT Program has regular ongoing contact with the incoming cohort including:

* Assistance with Tuition Waiver and/or Graduate Assistant Applications
* Sending an updated Student Handbook that includes the Plan of Study
* Registration Guidance
* Instructions for the Background Check
* Notification of Key Dates (e.g. Orientation Day)

## Program Recruitment Policy

The Program strives to recruit cohorts comprised of diverse individuals including but not limited to ethnicity, nationality, gender, religion and age. Recruitment is primarily the responsibility of the SMFT Program with support from the HDFS Area, the Chair of the College and the Graduate School. Within the NIU community, recruitment is comprised of:

* Classroom Presentations
* HDFS-487: Overview of Marriage and Family Therapy (Undergraduate Class)
* Speaking Engagements
* Recommendations of HDFS faculty
* Undergraduate Internship

Beyond NIU, recruitment efforts include:

* SMFT Website
* Contacts with Illinois Undergraduate Programs
* University Graduate Fairs (by the Graduate School)
* Program listing on the National Council for Family Relations (NCFR) website and annual conference proceedings
* Graduate Assistant recruitment appointments and competitive tuition waivers
* Visits by HDFS Faculty
* Program “One Page”
* Speaking Engagements
* Prompt Responses to Inquiries with Regular Follow-Up

## Program Retention Policy

The SMFT program facilitates the success and retention of all students in ways that are consistent with the university, college, school, area and program missions, anti-discrimination policy, through faculty training, academic advising and student support services.

## Reference Requests Policy

A student or graduate may wish for SMFT faculty and/or internship supervisors to provide a professional reference and/or write a letter of recommendation for positions in the community or for further education. Prior to graduation, the student can request that a faculty member serve as a reference by using the Recommendation Request Form (Appendix ET11 in the Student Handbook), which authorizes faculty to provide references. The same form may be used with internship supervisors. It is best practice to alert the reference when the need for a recommendation is impending.

## SMFT Program Exit Tasks

1. Complete the Exit Survey
2. Participate in an optional Exit Interview with the Program Director
3. Complete the Associate MFT licensing application including obtaining the necessary signatures from the Program Director.
4. Request References/Recommendations
5. Take home any personal items from the Pod, CFTC mailbox and/or kitchen

## Grading System

See [Grading System](http://catalog.niu.edu/content.php?catoid=51&navoid=2601#grad_syst)  section of the [Northern Illinois University Gradual School Catalog](http://catalog.niu.edu/index.php?catoid=51) for more information about NIU’s Grading Policies.

Grades for assignments and courses will be based on the*following scale:*

A 93-100% C+ 77-79.9%

A- 90-92.9% C 73-76.9%

B+ 87-89.9% C- 70-72.9%

B 83-86.9% D 60-69.9%

B- 80-82.9% F 59.9% and below

 S Satisfactory for courses graded S/U

 U Unsatisfactory for courses graded S/U

Students are expected to maintain a 3.0 or better throughout the program to remain in the program. Students doing less than satisfactory work will be assigned the grade of C-, D, F, or U. Graduate credit is given only for those courses in which a grade of S, or C or better, is earned. A grade of S indicates that the student has performed at a level equivalent to at least a B.

A graduate-level student who has accumulated 6 or more semester hours of grades of C-, D, F, U, or WF in graduate course work at NIU will be academically dismissed from the Graduate School, regardless of the student’s GPA. If a course is repeated, whether under the special repeat option or otherwise, the grades in both attempts will be considered in determining whether this 6- semester-hour total has been reached.

## Grade Appeal

A graduate-level student may formally appeal a course grade alleged to have been assigned capriciously. The definition of capricious grading is limited to:

* + The assignment of a grade to a particular student on some basis other than performance in the course
	+ The assignment of a grade to a particular student by more exacting or demanding standards than were applied to other students in that course
	+ The assignment of a grade by a substantial departure from the instructor’s standards announced during the first fourth of the course.

A grade appeal may not be based upon disagreement with the judgment of an instructor in assessing the quality of a student’s work. The student must submit a formal written appeal to the departmental Grade Review Board, through the chair of the department (Thomas Pavkov) offering the course, by the end of the fourth week of the fall or spring semester immediately following the term for which the course grade was assigned. A full description of procedures governing the appeal of allegedly capricious semester grades for graduate-level students may be obtained from the ombudsman, department offices, college offices and the office of the dean of the [Graduate School](http://www.niu.edu/grad)and this should be consulted before appealing a grade.

## Student Complaint and Grievance Process

Professional development is also a part of the training program. Students are encouraged to first have a cordial and professional conversation with the other party (peer, faculty member, or supervisor) involved when issues arise. When a student has an ethical concern about or a conflict with another student, faculty member, or supervisor that cannot be resolved through direct means, the student should:

1. Address the complaint to the SMFT Program Director.
2. If the complaint is not resolved satisfactorily, then the student appeals to the FACS Chair, Thomas Pavkov (tpavkov@niu.edu.)
3. If the student continues to be dissatisfied with the resolution of their grievance, an appeal may be made first to the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs and after that to the Dean of College of Health and Human Sciences.

Claims of discrimination or harassment by fellow students shall be addressed to the Chair of FACS and/or the [Student Conduct Office](https://www.niu.edu/conduct/about/index.shtml). The [Office of the Ombudsperson](https://www.niu.edu/ombuds/index.shtml) (815-753-1415) provides information on university procedures and is available as a resource for students at NIU. [Students’ Legal Assistance](https://www.niu.edu/legal/index.shtml) (815-753-1701) offers free legal services to current NIU students.

## Social Media Policy

Social media has become a daily part of our lives. In addition to being a representative of the Specialization in Marriage and Family Therapy Program at Northern Illinois University, you are also seen as mental health professional in training. Students need to be cognizant of their social media presence, especially if they have a public page. Student’s social media presence should uphold the mission of the SMFT program, the Area of Human Development and Family Science, the School of Family and Consumers Sciences, the College of Health and Human Sciences and the University. Students are not allowed to look up their client’s social media pages or search for information about their client on the internet. Students are not allowed to “follow”, “friend” or “connect with” their clients. Students are not allowed to discuss confidential or educational information about their peers on social media, which is a violation of Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA). Students are not allowed to discuss information about clients on social media or have posts in which client information can be seen, which is a violation of HIPAA. Do not share information that could identify clients.

Student postings that may represent a potential violation of the [Student Code of Conduct](https://www.niu.edu/conduct/student-code-of-conduct/index.shtml), or other applicable university policies, will be referred to [Student Conduct](https://www.niu.edu/conduct/index.shtml).

## Impaired Student -Therapist Policy

The SMFT Program can be very stressful, which can seriously impact personal, academic and clinical functioning. Students are encouraged to seek support from faculty when personal stress is impacting their academic and/or clinical performance. When faculty determine that a student's performance is impaired significantly by personal stress, intervention is essential for the well-being of the student and clients. Faculty and the student will collaborate on a recovery plan that may require temporary respite from or reduction in clinical work until the faculty determines that the student is no longer significantly impaired. Students can also call 815-753- 8300, email studentassistance@niu.edu or visit the [website](https://www.niu.edu/student-affairs/student-assistance/index.shtml) of the Center for Student Assistance for a variety of resources available to students.

## Personal Therapy for Students

SMFT faculty believe that therapy can be extremely beneficial for students both to cope with the stress of this intensive program and for personal growth. Thus, students are encouraged to seek personal therapy during the program. Students are **never required** to participate in therapy even in the event of serious impairment in functioning. SMFT faculty are available to assist students in finding a therapist.

## Sexual Harassment

NIU is committed to a learning environment free from sexual harassment and discrimination. Sexual harassment is not tolerated from faculty members, staff, student colleagues, or third parties. NIU has [procedures and resources](https://www.niu.edu/sexual-misconduct/education-training/annual.shtml) to assist students who have experienced or witnessed sexual harassment. All new students are required to complete the Annual Sexual Misconduct Awareness and Prevention.

## Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. You are here to learn. Understand that dishonesty in the classroom, through cheating, plagiarism, or other dishonest acts, defeats this purpose and disgraces the mission and quality of a Northern Illinois University education. If you are caught doing any of the acts listed above, you will receive an unsatisfactory grade for the semester. Definitions, types, causes and consequences of academic dishonesty can be found on the [Academic Integrity Student Tutorials](https://www.niu.edu/academic-integrity/students/index.shtml).

## Discipline and Remediation

Periodically, SMFT faculty identify problematic student comportment, such as unprofessional, unethical actions in clinical settings or academically inappropriate behaviors in coursework that require disciplinary action. In these instances, the typical process is for:

* SMFT faculty to consult and develop a remediation plan for the student
* one or more faculty members meet with the student to present the remediation plan
* follow-up with the student success or lack thereof with the remediation plan
* determine if further disciplinary action is required.

Remediation plans may increase in intensity for multiple infractions. For serious infractions, the FACS School Chair and the CHHS Associate Dean for Academic Affairs may be included in the development of a remediation plan and/or determination if dismissal from the program is warranted.

On other occasions, SMFT faculty identify students exhibiting academic learning problems and/or clinical impairment in therapist development. In these instances, SMFT faculty again consult to develop a remediation plan to address the learning difficulties and/or to facilitate therapist competence in the problem area. When remediation plans are unsuccessful in assisting the student to meet the minimum academic and clinical standards, the SMFT faculty must consider whether the student is suited for the field. The faculty do serve as gatekeepers for the competence of the field and for protection of the public.

## Dismissal from the Program

A student may be dismissed from the SMFT Program for:

* Poor academic and/or clinical performance including endangering the psychological health of clients
* Violation of Confidentiality or of [AAMFT Ethical Conduct](https://www.aamft.org/Legal_Ethics/Code_of_Ethics.aspx)
* Violation of the Policy and Procedures of the CFTC at NIU

Dismissal occurs only after efforts at remediation have failed to correct the infraction or improve performance or when multiple violations occur. However, immediate dismal can occur **when the violation is especially egregious**.

# Student Resources

## Minimum Technology Requirements and Training

Student can find technology resources and trainings on the webpage for the [Division of Information Technology](https://www.niu.edu/doit/help/students/index.shtml). SMFT students need a laptop computer for use at home and on campus. The computer must have the capability for the use of email, Microsoft Teams, VPN and Zoom. Students are provided with Microsoft Office, including Teams as well as VPN and Zoom. All platforms are HIPAA compliant. All courses will use Blackboard for communication, submission of assignments and grading. Thus, students must be adept in the use of Blackboard. Training for Blackboard is provided by the Division of Information Technology and can be found on their [webpage](https://blackboard.niu.edu/blackboard/students/index.shtml).

Students must have the ability to use the recording, including the review of videos and documentation systems in the CFTC. All SMFT students are trained in the use of CFTC equipment with ongoing help available from the clinic director and GAs. Students also must have the skill to conduct teletherapy using Microsoft Teams. The clinic director provides training in the policies and procedures of teletherapy.

Faculty are provided training concerning the learning management system (Blackboard) and technology resources for teaching through the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning.

## The Writing Center and NIU Library

Quality writing skills are essential to academic performance and as a professional therapist. The University Writing Center provides a safe place to become a skilled writer. The center offers formal and informal opportunities for guidance. For assistance contact the center at 815-753-6636 view the [University Writing Center website](https://www.niu.edu/academic-support/get-help/writing-center/index.shtml). SMFT students are strongly encouraged to make use of this resource.

[Founders Memorial Library](https://library.niu.edu/university-libraries/) has six levels with a seating capacity for 1600 students. The library participates in the I-Share Online Catalog System, which means that students can access books and journals from universities throughout Illinois. Materials not owned by NIU can be obtained quickly from other I-Share member libraries. Many recent publications may be accessed electronically through the library.

## Disability Resource Center

The SMFT Program is committed to providing an accessible educational environment in collaboration with the [Disability Resource Cente](https://www.niu.edu/disability/students.shtml)r (DRC). The DRC is located in the Campus Life Building Suite 180 and can be reached at 815-753-1303 or drc@niu.edu. A student requiring an academic accommodation should let each course professor know at the beginning of the semester.

## The NIU Graduate School—Career and Professional Development

Career and professional development resources are available to all graduate students through the NIU Graduate School office. The Community Portal provides access to an array of graduate career and development resources. Additional resources include self-discovery through the UNIV 601 course, career exploration supports, skill building activities, the development of an Individual Development Plan and opportunities to optimize LinkedIn profiles.