COUNSELING GRADUATE PROGRAM

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

BASIC INFORMATION

Q. What degree programs do you offer?
A. We offer three different programs: a 60-credit M.S. in Mental Health Counseling, a 60-credit M.S. in School Counseling, and an advanced certificate “bridge” program in mental health counseling.

Q. What are the differences among these programs?
A. Here are basic descriptions of each program in order to help prospective applicants differentiate between them:

The 60-credit Master of Science in Mental Health Counseling serves both students looking to become licensed as mental health counselors and those seeking to eventually proceed into doctoral programs. The curriculum covers mental health counseling practice and research, in addition to necessary coursework in human growth and development, social and cultural foundations, helping relationships, group work, career and lifestyle development, appraisal, research and program development, and professional orientation. Practicum and internship experiences provide unique, varied, and intense hands-on mental health counseling training experiences under supervision of licensed professionals. The degree is registered with the New York State Education Department (NYSED) as meeting the educational requirements for mental health counseling licensure in New York. The M.S. in mental health counseling degree can be completed full time in two years, including summer classes. Students may attend part time, but all degree requirements must be completed within five years after admission to degree candidacy. Admission is in the fall only.

The 60-credit Master of Science in School Counseling prepares students for certification as school counselors. The degree includes a core curriculum and specialization courses. The curriculum covers school counseling practice and research, in addition to necessary coursework in human growth and development, social and cultural foundations, helping relationships, group work, career and lifestyle development, appraisal, research and program development, and professional orientation. Practicum and internship experiences provide unique, varied, and intense hands-on school counseling training. The degree satisfies New York State Education Department (NYSED) requirements for
provisional/permanent certification in school counseling, with SUNY New Paltz recommending graduates for certification. The degree can be completed full time in two years, including summer classes. Students may attend part time, but all degree requirements must be completed within five years after admission to degree candidacy.

The 24-credit* Advanced Certificate in Mental Health Counseling is a bridge program that addresses the needs of two distinct cohorts, both requiring supplemental coursework and training to qualify for licensure as mental health counselors in New York State. Students with 36- or 48-credit degrees in mental health counseling will accrue the additional credits needed to meet the 60-credit education requirement for licensure, while those with 36-60-credit degrees in other areas of counseling (or a closely related helping-professions discipline) will acquire the specialized courses and fieldwork necessary to retrain as mental health counselors. All students complete the 12-credit practicum/internship sequence (COU530, COU771, COU772), which includes more than 600 hours of supervised mental health counseling experience, plus 12 additional credits based on review of their prior graduate transcripts and identification of specific courses needed to fulfill licensure requirements. Admission to the program is in spring only. Consistent with the mission of the State University of New York at New Paltz, the advanced certificate program provides students with a challenging, student-centered, and personalized learning environment that enables them to gain the knowledge, skills, and confidence to contribute productively to their profession and communities. For those professionals interested in “retooling” within the broad field of counseling, the advanced certificate program facilitates mid-career changes in specialization to meet professional goals and local and regional needs.

* Graduates of the SUNY New Paltz M.S. in School Counseling degree require only 18 credits to complete this advanced certificate.

Q. I want to visit campus. May I?
A. Yes. Contact the program secretary, Susan Buckbee. She can schedule a visit time. Her contact information is here: http://www.newpaltz.edu/psychology/faculty.cfm

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A. Once all materials are received by the Graduate School. Applicants should follow up with the Graduate School to make sure that GRE score reports, recommendation letters, and official transcripts are in on time, as these are items the applicant must rely on others to provide.

Q. Do you do both fall and spring admissions?
A. For the master’s degrees in mental health and school counseling, applicants are admitted only for the fall semester. For the advanced certificate program in mental health counseling, applicants are admitted only for the spring semester.

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**Application Review Process**

Q. What date do you begin reviewing applicants for admission?
A. February 1 for fall admissions to the master’s programs. November 1 for spring admissions to the advanced certificate program.

Q. I didn’t get my application in by the due date. Will that hurt my chances of admission?
A. Maybe. We begin reviewing applicants on these dates and continue to review incoming applications as long as slots remain open in the incoming class. Applications arriving after the specified dates will be reviewed if slots remain. However, you insure the best chance of consideration if your application is complete by the dates indicated.

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**GRE Scores**

Q. I have not taken the GREs. Do I really have to?
A. All applicants for the master’s programs must take the GREs and receive a satisfactory score (preferably a combined score of 1000 or higher). GRE registration information is available at www.gre.org. Applicants for the advanced certificate program in mental health counseling do not need to take the GREs.

Q. I took the GRE many years ago. Do I need to retake it?
A. ETS considers GRE scores current if they are less than five years old. If ETS will not send an official score report to us because your GRE scores are older than that, then you need to retake the GRE and have current scores sent to us by ETS.

Q. What is the average GRE score of students admitted to and attending the program?
A. The average student entering the program has a combined verbal and quantitative GRE score that tends to be just above 1000.

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**Recommendation Letters**

Q. Who should I ask to write me recommendation letters?
A. This is up to the applicant. However, recommendation letters should address the relevant academic, professional, and personal qualities that make the applicant a
strong candidate for graduate training in counseling. Recommenders who can speak to these issues are the ones you should seek.

Q. Is there anyone I should not ask to be a recommender?
A. Relatives, significant others, and personal friends should not serve as recommenders; nor should people unable to convincingly speak to the applicant’s academic, professional, and personal experiences. Your doctor or therapist is also not a good source of recommendation letters.

Q. I don’t have any potential recommenders who can speak to the relevant academic, professional, and personal experiences that make the applicant a strong candidate for graduate training in counseling. What should I do?
A. It is the applicant’s responsibility to find recommenders who can speak to these issues. We discourage applicants from contacting us to tell us they are unable to locate suitable recommenders, as this simply reflects poorly on the applicant.

**Prerequisite Coursework**

Q. I haven’t taken the necessary prerequisite courses. Will this be held against me?
A. Yes. Applicants who have not completed the necessary prerequisites will not be considered for admission.

Q. Do I have to have majored in psychology to get into the master’s program?
A. No. You simply need to meet the admission requirements, including prerequisite courses.

Q. For the master’s degrees, applicants must have successfully completed nine undergraduate credits in psychology or related social sciences. What count as “related social sciences?”
A. Courses in counseling, counselor education, social work, and sociology would be examples of “related social sciences.” If you have taken a social science course in another area and are uncertain if it counts, contact the program to inquire. You will need to provide the university name, department name, course name, and course description of the course at hand.

Q. Do the required prerequisite courses in statistics and research methods have to be taken in psychology?
A. No. These courses simply must cover inferential statistics and research methods. Applicants are strongly encouraged to include with their applications catalog course descriptions of the coursework covering this material so that the admissions committee can evaluate whether the courses cover the proper content.

Q. Do the statistics and research methods courses have to be part of the nine social science credits required for admission?
A. No. They may be part of, or in addition to, the nine undergraduate credits in psychology or related social sciences.

Q. I am currently taking one or more of the necessary prerequisite courses. Will the fact that I have not completed them before applying hurt my chances of admission?
A. Possibly, as we cannot evaluate your performance in them until you complete and receive grades for them. If there is an applicant who has completed and received grades in these courses but is otherwise equivalent to you, that applicant will understandably have an advantage over you.

Q. What if I didn’t complete the prerequisite course requirements because I didn’t take a lot of psychology or social science classes as an undergraduate? Do I still need to meet these requirements?
A. Yes, which means you may need to go back and take some additional undergraduate classes before applying.

Q. Where should I take the prerequisite requirements if I need to go back and take them before applying?
A. Any accredited college or university is fine. For those without easy access to a college campus, we often recommend the online SUNY Learning Network: http://sln.suny.edu/index.html

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**GPA Requirements**

Q. For the master’s degrees, applicants must have successfully completed nine undergraduate credits in psychology or related social sciences. What is considered “successful”?
A. Typically, a grade of “B” or better is considered successful.

Q. My GPA is below 3.0. Can the fact that I have life experience make up for this in considering my application?
A. Everyone has life experience, even those with GPAs above 3.0. If your undergraduate GPA was below 3.0, then you must show us recent evidence of academic achievement in order to compensate for this. You can do this by taking (and doing 3.0 or better work in) several relevant undergraduate classes in order to demonstrate that your earlier GPA is not indicative of your potential.

Q. If I take additional classes prior to applying in order to show evidence of recent academic achievement and improve my chances of admission, will I get in?
A. Taking additional coursework to show evidence of recent academic achievement does not guarantee admission. Admission depends on the strength of your overall application, as well as the strength of that year’s applicant pool.

Q. What is the typical GPA of students admitted to and entering the program?
A. The average student entering the program for typically has an undergraduate GPA at or above 3.0; some student GPAs are significantly higher than 3.0.

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**Statement of Objectives**

Q. What advice do you have for applicants writing their Statement of Objectives?
A. Applicants should include relevant material demonstrating how their academic, professional, and personal qualities make them strong candidates for graduate training in counseling.
Q. How important is the quality of my writing?
A. It is very important. Grammar, spelling, and quality of writing count. The Statement of Objectives provides the admissions committee with information about how well you use the written word to convey ideas. Clear and effective writing is essential to both success in graduate coursework and effectiveness as a professional counselor who will be required to compose case reports, assessment reports, and other written documents.

Q. What other advice do you have for writing the Statement of Objectives?
A. Applicants should keep in mind that the statement is a professional document; an overly informal style is not appropriate.

Counseling Experience

Q. I don’t have any counseling experience. Will this work against me?
A. Counseling experience is one important aspect of an application. While it is not necessary to have worked as a counselor, applicants who have completed undergraduate fieldwork experiences or volunteered to work in a counseling-oriented agency or related environment are at an advantage over equally qualified applicants who lack this experience.

Q. If I have not acquired any counseling experience while an undergraduate and want to now, what recommendations do you have for doing so?
A. Contacting local agencies in your area and asking to volunteer is a good way to gain valuable experience in a counseling setting. Previous applicants have volunteered at hospices, community mental health clinics, women’s shelters, schools, vocational outreach programs, and Big Brother/Big Sister programs. Working in such settings provides prospective applicants an opportunity to learn whether a career in counseling is for them; it also provides the admissions committee with evidence that an applicant has a facility for human services work.

Supplemental Materials

Q. I worked on research while an undergraduate and have a paper I wrote that I think would enhance my application. May I include it?
A. Yes! Applicants are encouraged to include copies of research papers they have completed, especially if they have been published or presented at conferences.

Q. What other materials should I include with my application?
A. This is up to you. However, including relevant supplemental materials that enhance the applicant’s case for admission is encouraged. Examples of such materials are resumes, papers, conference presentations, or other written materials that provide evidence the applicant will make a good counseling trainee.

Interviews

Q. I want to come for an interview. Can I schedule this myself?
A. No. Whether an applicant is interviewed is decided by the admissions committee after they review applications. If an interview is desired, the admissions committee will contact you.

Q. If I am selected for an interview, will it be in person?
A. Typically, all interviews are done by phone, but this varies by year.

COMPLETING THE PROGRAM

Q. How long will it take to complete the program?
A. Students can complete the program in two calendar years if they attend full-time.

Q. How long do I have to complete my degree?
A. Students have five years from the time they enter the program to complete all degree requirements.

Q. Will I have an advisor?
A. Yes. All students are assigned a faculty advisor upon admission into the program.

Q. I work. Can I take all my classes at night?
A. No. We do not currently offer a night-classes only program. Courses are generally once per week (with some exceptions, typically statistics and research methods classes that tend not to work as well when held once per week). Class times vary, though we try to offer as many of them in the early morning or late afternoons/evenings as we can.

Q. Can I take my classes online?
A. Generally, no. We have a few elective summer classes that are offered online. However, classes are otherwise generally in person.

Q. Can students in one of the counseling programs switch to the other?
A. No. Students admitted into one of the programs who wish to change programs must apply and be admitted to the other program.

TRANSFER CREDITS

Q. I have attended a counseling program at another institution and have completed most of the classes. Can I receive transfer credit for them at New Paltz?
A. University rules only allow 6-9 credits from another institution to be transferred in for credit.

Q. When should I make a transfer credit request?
A. Transfer of credit requests will only be considered after a student has been accepted and decided to attend the program.

Q. How do I transfer in credits taken at another institution prior to admission?
A. To transfer a course from elsewhere, students must submit the course description (and, if they have it, the course syllabus) to the program director. If the proposed
transfer course has an equivalent course in our program and the student earned a “B” or better in it, then transfer credit will likely be given. We do not transfer practicum or internship credits. See the Graduate Catalog for further details on transferring courses.

**SELF-EXAMINATION AND PERSONAL GROWTH**

Q. Counseling is an emotionally demanding profession. To what extent are students in the program expected to engage in self-examination and personal growth?
A. Students are expected to be open to not only academic growth, but personal growth. There is no way to become a competent professional counselor without engaging in extensive self-examination and personal growth throughout one’s training.

Q. Beyond academic work, what personal demands are required of students being trained as counselors in your program?
A. Becoming a professional counselor requires not only mastering academic work, but also gaining self-awareness and insight as one develops the necessary relational skills of an effective counselor. Counseling training is not a purely academic exercise. It requires students to examine their own psychological issues as part of their professional development. Applicants who are not open to this sort of self-reflection and examination are not good candidates for the program.

Q. Are students in the program expected to be in counseling themselves?
A. We strongly encourage, but do not require, that students in the program seek their own personal counseling. A great deal of the program’s training involves students working with real life clients in applied settings. An important part of any counselor’s professional development involves becoming aware of what it is like to be a client; one way to gain this knowledge is by being a client oneself. Further, counseling training makes many emotional demands on students and sometimes these demands bring a student’s own personal issues to the surface; having one’s own counseling as a place to work through these issues is often vitally important. We are happy to offer referrals to students seeking counseling.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Q. Where can I find further information about the program?
A. The Counseling Graduate Program website contains detailed information about admissions requirements, course requirements, and practicum and internship requirements:
   [http://www.newpaltz.edu/psychology/graduate/counseling.html](http://www.newpaltz.edu/psychology/graduate/counseling.html)

Q. Does the program have a student handbook I could read?
A. Yes. The handbook, which is revised each year and provided to incoming students, is available on our website. It provides detailed information about all program requirements and policies:
   [http://www.newpaltz.edu/psychology/graduate/grad_handbook.pdf](http://www.newpaltz.edu/psychology/graduate/grad_handbook.pdf)
Q. I have questions not answered here and want to come in to meet someone to talk about the program. Can I do so?

A. Yes. If you have questions that remain unanswered, contact the program secretary, Susan Buckbee, to set up a time to meet or talk by phone. Her contact information is available online at http://www.newpaltz.edu/psychology/faculty.cfm.