

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **Distinguishing Marriage & Family Therapy from Other Mental Health Disciplines**

#### **What is Marriage & Family Therapy?**

Marriage and Family Therapist (MFT) is an established mental health profession that was begun by the establishment of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy in 1942. Since that time, MFTs have provided therapeutic services to individuals and groups that involve the application of relationships and how they affect one's mental health. It is often brief, solution-focused, and specific to the needs of those in the treatment process. Family members' interactions with one another establish patterns over time and often influence a person's identity and current relationship experiences. This is often a part of the therapist's treatment plan and often includes more than one person in the room in treatment. MFTs believe that the core of treatment should be the relationship patterns/interactions in family units. The training of an MFT consists, in the UHCL Family Therapy Program, of family systems theories and techniques by approved supervisors by the Texas board (TSBEMFT)

[www.dshs.state.tx.us/mft](http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/mft) or the American Association of Marriage & Family Therapy (AAMFT)

Approved Supervisors [www.aamft.org](http://www.aamft.org)

Marriage and Family Therapists treat a wide range of serious clinical problems including: depression, marital problems, parent/child interactions, substance abuse, domestic violence, anxiety, grief challenges and individual psychological difficulties.

#### **Who are Marriage and Family Therapists?**

Marriage and Family Therapists (MFTs) are mental health professionals trained in family systems and psychotherapy clinical treatment, and licensed to diagnose and treat mental and emotional disorders within the context of individual, marriage, couple, and family processes.

Although MFTs broaden the traditional emphasis on the individual to attend to the nature and role of individuals in primary relationship networks, MFTs have a holistic approach to health care in general and tend to be concerned with the overall, long-term well-being of individuals and their families.

For more information on the professional of Marriage & Family Therapy, please contact the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy website at [www.aamft.org](http://www.aamft.org).

#### **What is the difference between Marriage & Family Therapy and Social Work?**

Generally speaking, there are **similarities** between MFTs and Social Work (SW). In Texas, for instance, both degrees lead toward a professional license and the ability to provide clinical services in health care and social service settings. With specific training, both can provide the ability to provide clinical services in private practice as well. Both disciplines emphasize the importance of understanding individuals in their social context with MFTs theoretical roots in family systems theory while SW tending toward an emphasis on ecological-systems theoretical perspective. Both disciplines give careful attention to diversity, social justice, and change.

There are also **differences** to weigh when considering career paths. MFTs tend to emphasize individual, couples, and family therapy clinical treatment processes while SW places a strong emphasis on social systems, social change, social advocacy, and policy. It also has a strong emphasis on case management processes of individuals.

In the UHCL Marriage and Family Therapy program, clinical training consists of extensive live and videotaped direct client contact under the supervision of an AAMFT Approved Supervisor at the UHCL Psychological Services Clinic on campus. Additional clinical training is gained at an off-campus, community-based location at a setting of your interest. Individual and group supervision occur on a weekly basis and include courses in assessment, diagnosis, treatment planning and collaboration with other health care professionals. All courses in our curriculum are designed to provide core knowledge and training toward the development of talented clinicians who are able to work effectively with a wide variety of client populations. Our training program heavily emphasizes preparation for clinical practice is generally much higher in MFT programs. In addition, faculty and supervisors participation in students' clinical training, including direct observation of work as a developing MFT, is much higher in nationally accredited MFT programs than in nationally-accredited SW programs.

Both the profession of MFT and the profession of SW offer exciting and interesting career opportunities. It is largely a matter of being as clear as you can be about what kind of career you would like to practice. A careful review of the overall training program at schools of interest – what the program offers and what the experience will be like as a student – is very useful way to know whether the program, and the discipline by extension is a good fit. And, it is always good to interview a professional that you admire in each discipline to see if it is a fit for you.

Nationally accredited programs are the way to go in whatever discipline you decide. They offer some assurance that rigorous, high quality, and standardized training requirements are being met. We do not recommend any program in any discipline that is not nationally accredited by its accrediting body of its profession. For the UHCL Marriage and Family Therapy program, it is the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education. See [www.aamft.org](http://www.aamft.org) for more information.

Please be aware that our comments here are generalized and not aimed at any specific program or discipline. Programs do vary throughout the US. We urge you to visit the websites for National Association for Social Work as well as the American Psychological Association and information concerning the Texas State Board of Examiners for Licensed Professional Counselors.

## **Program Characteristics**

### **Do we offer online courses?**

Currently, our courses are offered on campus with face to face instruction, although many of our courses use supplemental online resources and programs. There may be one or two courses that have class periods in which the class meets online rather than on campus to complete the week's assignment. But we are committed to the process that being a good therapist means you interact face to face with instructors, supervisors, and classmates in order to get the most out of your training.

### **Is the UHCL Marriage and Family Therapy Program accredited?**

Yes, the program has been accredited since 1983 by the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE) of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy ([www.aamft.org](http://www.aamft.org)). We are one of the oldest accredited programs in the state of Texas and the only one in Houston, Texas. Accreditation process is important for a program such as ours as it supports the idea that you are learning the standards of the profession, its history, and the theoretical ideas that drive the treatment process. You know you have been well trained when you graduate from an accredited program.

**What is the age of your students?**

The age of our current students range from 22 through 60 years. We look for a variety of age so that we can learn from one another and support the needs of our profession.

**How diverse are the student cohorts?**

As many as a third of our students come from out of state or out of the country. We seek diversity in our student policy as it makes for a rich, learning process. Our students come from backgrounds comprising of Latino, Asian, African, African-American, Native-American, and Euro-American descent. Approximately 80% of the program consists of women.

The university's student population reflects a diverse mix of ethnicities with 36 percent comprising of Latinos, African-Americans, Asian-Americans, and Native-Americans while about 10% encompasses international students from around the world. In 2010, UHCL became a designated Hispanic-Serving Institution by the Hispanic Association of Colleges & Universities. Our program reflects a strong commitment to diversity.

**Can I attend the program on a part-time basis while working?**

Yes. We have many graduates who have attended the program on a part-time basis and have done well. The program can be completed within a 3 to 5 year window. We encourage you to check with your advisor or the Program Director for further details.

**Does the Marriage and Family Therapy Program require a thesis to graduate?**

The faculty does not require students in the program to write a thesis. Instead, our curriculum fulfills coursework for students to sit for the **Licensed Marriage & Family Therapy (LMFT) Examination** [www.dshs.state.tx.us/mft](http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/mft) just before graduation during ones' internship year and the **Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) Examination** [www.dshs.state.tx.us/counselor](http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/counselor) after ones' graduation and while under supervision. To meet the LPC Exam, one needs to take either PSYC 5335 Career Counseling or PSYC 5231 Psychotherapy Theories depending on which elective you chose while in the program.

**How many graduate hours constitute a full load?**

We consider 12 graduate hours to be a full load per semester.

**Are there research opportunities?**

Yes, our full-time faculty have on-going research projects that may be of interest to you and they may have a place for your participation. It is not required however to be a part of the program. Many of our students are interested primarily in clinical training while others plan on going on for doctoral studies. Those students who are planning on further academic training may want to explore the possibility of research participation with faculty.

**How would you describe your faculty?**

The FT Faculty at UHCL is a diverse yet collaborative group dedicated to teaching, professional leadership, clinical practice, and research. We all have our research interests and projects and enjoy student participation when relevant. We collaborate regularly and often as a team on coursework, student issues, and curriculum as well as leadership in the university and the mental health professional community to provide the rich and rewarding experiences that you will encounter while being a student.

We believe in community and work to facilitate one throughout your time with us. You will undoubtedly make life-time friends and colleagues while being in the program.

All faculty members in the program must be active in clinical practice and training as part of accreditation standards.

## **Admissions**

### **Can I take classes if I am not accepted into the program?**

It is the policy of the Professional Psychology Program faculty that only students that are formally accepted into one of the Professional Psychology Programs, which the Marriage and Family Therapy program is a part, will be allowed to register for certain theory and practice courses which are required for mental health credentialing. The list of courses restricted to professional psychology students can be found in the Professional Psychology brochure and application packet in the HSH Advising Office 1-502.

### **Are there required courses or pre-requisites that I must complete before entering the program?**

Introductory Psychology and Abnormal Psychology at the undergraduate level are needing to be completed or in process before the application for the program be submitted.

### **What can I do to increase my chances of being accepted into the program?**

Study thoroughly before taking the GRE and if you score poorly, take it again. There are no punishments for taking the test several times. If you just can't seem to do as well as others on the test, don't let that stop you on applying. We look at a person's overall application package during the process of accepting new students. Volunteer work at community mental health centers for a period of time is a plus for our faculty and we also look at your recommendations closely. We also want to know that you understand the profession of Marriage & Family Therapy by writing about it in your essay.

### **Can I be accepted into the program in winter or spring semesters?**

All applicants apply to the program by January 25 of each year for acceptance into the fall semester. Interviews and acceptance into the program are done once annually.

### **Do I have to finish my undergraduate degree before I can apply to the program?**

You do not have to have an undergraduate degree completed to apply but both the Marriage and Family Therapy program and the Graduate School in Human Sciences and Humanities where the FT Program is housed requires that you complete your undergraduate degree from an accredited college or university before you are allowed to matriculate in fall. See the Graduate School website for admission requirements.

### **If I am already a student at UHCL, do I still need to send official transcripts?**

No.

**Can I provide more than 3 letters of recommendation?**

Yes, but this is not necessary. It is not the number of letters that is important but the quality of the letters that is most important. We would like the letters to be from people that would know that you are in the right field and can recommend you as a mental health professional. Friends and family members cannot always be good references unless they are mental health professionals themselves and that is still not always strong due to bias factors. We want letters from objective references who can recommend you and understand what you are walking into as a mental health professional.

**Do the letters have to come from professors?**

No. The letters may be from an academic source but letters from mental health professionals, volunteer supervisors, and/or workplace administrators who know the applicant well are highly regarded if written well. An academic reference from a professor who knows you well and you have either been a part of his/her research team or had several classes with is an excellent reference.

**What GRE score is needed to be accepted?**

We prefer a GRE score of 297 or better (combining verbal & quantitative sections) which translates to a score of 1000 or better in the older system of scoring the GRE. Please do remember however that we look at the overall package of the application and a GRE score is just one indicator of ‘fit’ for the program.

**Do I have to take the GRE if I already have an MA, MS, PhD, etc? Do I have to take the tests if I am an international student applying for admission?**

If you have a graduate degree in a behavioral science discipline, you do not have to take the GRE to apply to the program. If you are an international student without a graduate degree, you do need to take the GRE.

**Do I have to have my scores for the GRE before the application deadline?**

Yes. Test scores are due at the same time as the rest of the application materials, January 25. Scores may take up to 6 weeks to be received so we recommend that you take the test by December 15 or even earlier.

**What is the average GPA for admitted students?**

All applicants are expected to have a minimum 3.2 undergraduate GPA.

**How are the different components of my application weighted by faculty for acceptance into the program?**

Phase of the Application Process is an evaluation of the student application. All components of the application are taken into consideration. Some faculty weigh certain components higher than others. The GPA, letters of recommendation, GRE scores, essay response, work experience, and curriculum vitae are all strong components of the application and are reviewed and scored based on their strength by the faculty. If you score well on Phase 1, you will be invited to Phase 2, the Applicant Campus Interview. The admissions committee weighs the applicant campus interview process as a strong component of the selection process along with the application in Phase 1.

## **Applicant Campus Interviews**

### **When is the interview process for the selection of students?**

Interviews for new students are held annually at the end of February to mid-March or the time between the beginning of the semester and the semester break. We try to make selections before spring break. This half-day process includes meeting faculty, staff, current students, and a tour of campus. Each applicant will be involved in group interviews and role-plays. Each candidate is given ample time to ask questions of professors and current students.

### **Is everyone who applies invited to interview?**

No. Initially, during phase 1, the admissions committee reviews all application folders and decides which applicants will be selected to move onto phase 2 of the interview process – the applicant campus interview.

### **If I am invited to Applicant Campus Interview, am I required to attend, or can I schedule a phone interview instead?**

Internationally located applicants will receive a phone interview if desired however all US applicants are strongly encouraged to attend. This is not just for the program faculty to meet you but for you to experience the program climate and environment so that you can see if the program is right for you. We make every effort to make it as comprehensive as possible so that you and the admissions team can make the best selection possible.

Obtaining a graduate degree is a considerable commitment in both time and money. The decision about where you want to earn your degree is a serious one and is best learned by attending all information meetings that are offered. We encourage you to make every effort to attend the Applicant Campus Interview when possible.

### **After the applicant campus interviews, when will I hear about the admissions decisions?**

Email letters notifying applicants of their admission status are usually sent within 3 – 4 weeks after the end of the interviews.

### **How many applicants are accepted into the Marriage and Family Therapy Program?**

We generally accept anywhere between 14 – 18 students per year. Offers are extended to approximately 40% of total applicants annually.

### **If accepted into the program, how many hours may I transfer into the program?**

A maximum of 12 semester credit hours can be transferred into the program, provided that they are graduate level courses and are deemed equivalent of program courses by faculty. Course transfer decisions are made by the Program Director and are determined after acceptance to the program.

**If I am accepted into the program but am unable to start the Fall semester of the year I was accepted, can I defer enrollment?**

The Marriage and Family Therapy program cannot defer enrollment into the program. You can re-apply in the year that you are ready to attend but there is no guarantee that you will be accepted again.

## **Financial Aid**

**How much will tuition and fees cost?**

The Financial Aid website provides a breakdown of tuition and fees as a graduate student, both resident and non-resident. Students in the FT program are registered for 12 credit hours each semester for a total of 7 semesters.

**What kind of financial assistance is available?**

We know that many students need financial assistance for their education. UHCL offers the Dollars for Scholars program for incoming students that waives out of state tuition for students that qualify. In addition, the FT program offers competitive scholarships annually to family therapy students. The Financial Aid Office can help with providing students with low interest loans and additional aid. In general, Texas offers a low cost-of-living environment with affordable housing and tuition compared to many metropolitan areas in the US.

## **Degree, Licensure, and Employment**

**What will I have once I graduate?**

You will graduate with a Master of Arts (MA) in Marriage and Family Therapy. You will also have acquired the graduate courses necessary to sit for the **Licensed Marriage & Family Therapy examination** in Texas [www.dshs.state.tx.us/mft](http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/mft) which current students often sit for their last two semesters in the program and most of the courses required to sit for the **Licensed Professional Counselor examination** in Texas [www.dshs.state.tx.us/counselor](http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/counselor)

**After students graduate, do they find employment as family therapists? Do alumni become licensed?**

Alumni are very successful finding employment in a variety of settings. For example, they have gained employment in community mental health agencies, hospitals, school-based agencies, addiction recovery units, outpatient clinics, Veterans Administration, private practices, medical schools, and residential treatment centers. Many alumni are leaders in Texas as clinical directors, clinical supervisors, private practitioners, approved supervisors, and faculty members in universities throughout the US. There are over 650+ graduates from around the world.

In order to be a fully functioning MFT who practices therapy in the treatment setting, one must be licensed by the state in which the practice takes place. Most of the alumni from the UHCL Marriage and Family program who have been surveyed after graduation in the first two years (2013) report having obtained licensure as either or both an LMFTA or LPCI (90%).

### **What is the average salary of a LMFT?**

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the national average salary for a LMFT in their first few years is \$47,530. This average differs from state to state and further information can be found on their website at [www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov)

## **Personal Information**

### **What do graduate students do for fun in Houston and the surrounding area?**

Our campus is located within a 524-acre wildlife and nature preserve offering students, faculty, and alumni a unique and beautiful environment in which to study and learn. Participants are also 30 minutes away from Houston to the north and Galveston to the south for a wonderful campus getaway in all directions. Houston is the 4<sup>th</sup> largest city in the US and one of the most diverse cities in the world. It is a remarkable living environment with art, music, and film opportunities everywhere you travel. It is also a family friendly environment with much to offer both parents and children.

The Family Therapy Student Association (FTSA) is an active student based organization on campus that provides opportunities for networking, social opportunities, and a chance to share knowledge and experiences. See a tab on this website for further information.