

Request to Establish New Academic Program in Arizona

Please complete all fields. Boxes may be expanded to accommodate longer responses. Clarifying field descriptions can be found below.

University: The University of Arizona

Name of Proposed Academic Program: Master of Science in Marriage and Family Therapy
Academic Department: Norton School of Human Ecology
Geographic Site: Tucson-Main
Instructional Modality: In Person
Total Credit Hours: 61
Proposed Inception Term: Fall 2025
Brief Program Description: <p>Marriage and Family Therapists, often referred to as MFTs, are highly sought-after, licensed mental health professionals that treat individuals, couples, and families. Recognized by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as one of the five core mental health professions, MFTs work to understand symptoms and diagnoses with a unique focus on interpersonal interactions – family, coworkers, friends – and how these relationships can help or challenge mental well-being.</p> <p>The master’s degree program in Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) provides students with applied learning experiences and a direct pathway to licensure in the MFT profession. Courses provide in-depth learning in diagnosis and treatment of mental illness, analysis of family dynamics, conflict resolution, trauma response and treatment, active listening skills, sex therapy, play therapy, professional ethics, and more. Students will have the opportunity to take elective courses in family financial planning in order to help families work through financially-based issues. While completing practicum, students will receive clinical supervision from licensed professional MFTs, available for English- and Spanish-speaking clients. At the conclusion of the program, students will be eligible to sit for licensure exams and apply for MFT licensure. As professionals in MFT, our graduates join the mental health profession as highly knowledgeable, practiced clinicians who can immediately join the workforce.</p>
Learning Outcomes and Assessment Plan: Define the core concepts and competencies that the program will convey and stipulate how these key learning outcomes will be measured and assessed.

Learning Outcome #1: Demonstrate competence in systemic conceptualization, assessment, treatment, and practice for individual, couple, and family relationship-based issues.

- Concepts: Students will apply knowledge of family systems-based assessment and treatment strategies in clinical practice of MFT.
- Competencies: Students will demonstrate knowledge of family systems-based assessment and treatment strategies.
- Assessment Methods: This outcome will be assessed in homework, exams, papers or other student projects, passing a clinical screening, and successfully managing a clinical caseload (direct) and student exit surveys (indirect).
- Measures: Instructor grading of homework, exams, papers or other student projects; MFT Student Clinical Evaluation Form (must average ratings of proficient or higher on *clinical skills, professionalism, systemic analysis, and systemic treatment* items; completed by student's clinical supervisor); student responses on the exit surveys.

Learning Outcome #2: Demonstrate ethical behavior and knowledge of ethical policies and procedures.

- Concepts: Students will effectively use ethical models and professional ethical codes of conduct in their learning and practice.
- Competencies: Students will demonstrate their use of ethical behavior in their learning and practice.
- Assessment Methods: This outcome will be assessed in homework, exams, papers or capstone projects (direct) and student exit surveys (indirect).
- Measures: Instructor grading of homework, exams, and papers; MFT Student Clinical Evaluation Form (must average ratings of proficient or higher on ethics items; completed by student's clinical supervisor); student responses on the exit surveys.

Learning Outcome #3: Integrate culturally informed approaches in their academic work and clinical settings.

- Concepts: will apply multicultural humility and inclusive practices in their clinical work and learning.
- Competencies: Students will demonstrate multiculturally-informed practices in clinical work and learning.
- Assessment Methods: This outcome will be assessed in homework, exams, papers or capstone projects (direct) and student exit surveys (indirect).
- Measures: Instructor grading of homework, exams, and papers; MFT Student Clinical Evaluation Form (must average ratings of proficient or higher on multicultural humility items; completed by student's clinical supervisor); student responses on the exit surveys.

Learning Outcome #4: Demonstrate knowledge of the diagnostic criteria for mental health disorders and best practices for assessment and treatment of those issues, focusing on systemic treatments and assessments.

- Concepts: Students will effectively apply knowledge of diagnostic criteria, diagnostic assessment/evaluation practices, and corresponding systemic treatments and assessments.
- Competencies: Students will demonstrate their ability to perform accurate diagnostic assessments, conceptualizations, and treatment planning associated with said diagnosis(es)/assessments.

- Assessment Methods: This outcome will be assessed in classroom interaction, homework (direct) and student exit surveys (indirect).
- Measures: Instructor grading of classroom interaction and homework; student responses on the exit surveys.

Learning Outcome #5: Evaluate, interpret, and explain relevant research on relevant topics and findings related to MFT.

- Concepts: Students will utilize their acquired knowledge to incorporate research findings into their clinical conceptualization and practice.
- Competencies: Students will demonstrate their ability to understand and apply new research in their clinical practice.
- Assessment Methods: This outcome will be assessed in classroom interaction, homework or capstone projects (direct) and student exit surveys (indirect).
- Measures: Instructor grading of classroom interaction and homework; Clinical Capstone Evaluation Rubric (ratings of proficient or higher in faculty evaluations of clinical capstone project); student responses on the exit surveys.

Projected Enrollment for the First Three Years:

Year 1: 15

Year 2: 35

Year 3: 50

There is already strong interest among HDFS undergraduates in this program; survey results described above report that around 110 current HDFS undergraduate students would be *interested* or *very interested* in applying to a graduate MFT program at UArizona. This does not include students from other fields of study such as psychology, sociology, etc., where MFT applicants frequently originate; it also excludes students from other state institutions or from out-of-state. We anticipate being able to easily meet enrollment goals, and that we will have more applicants than available slots in the program.

MFT programs are frequently run in a cohort model, where students progress through their academic and clinical training within groups. We aim to start the program with a smaller-size cohort because each MFT student must be placed in a clinical practicum site during their training. We do not want to offer more admissions spots than we have available practicum sites. As the program becomes more established, we will have more practicum sites available and can admit larger size cohorts. We anticipate eventually admitting cohorts of around 25 students per year once the program is fully running. Thus, we would have about 50 students enrolled per academic year, with 25 from the first-year cohort and 25 from the second-year cohort.

Students are expected to complete the program within 2 full years (including summer terms). We will admit them in cohorts of 25 per fall semester. Thus, we should be graduating that number of students once the program is fully up and running, with earlier years producing smaller numbers of graduates as we admit smaller cohorts while we begin establishing the program.

Please provide anticipated enrollment numbers for each of the first three years of the proposed program

Evidence of Market Demand:

The job market for MFTs is promising, both within Arizona and nationwide, with high rates of job growth over the next 10 years projected locally and throughout the country (reports generated by Curricular Affairs). Salary for MFTs is approximately \$20,000 higher than the average salaries within Arizona and nationally. Since the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, mental health has been at the forefront of discussion, policy, and concern among individuals, families, employers, educational institutions, and policy makers. Factors related to increases in mental health problems were exacerbated by the global pandemic, including individual isolation, social disconnect, stress, grief/loss, and anxiety.

As the prominence of mental health professionals' positive contributions in communities and families has increased during and post-pandemic, the projections for job growth also demonstrate continued growth in this field. Recognizing the toll of mental health on the nation, the Biden administration has recently announced releasing \$85 million dollars to address mental health training, treatment, and increase awareness of mental health problems; a substantial portion of these funds are designated to increase therapy options for families of children with mental health problems (Simons-Duffin & Chatterjee, 8-27-21).

Marriage and family therapy is a cost-effective treatment approach for families and for the national healthcare system in general. MFT professionals have been highlighted as cost-effective mental health treatment providers that save families and institutions money on healthcare costs (Crane & Christenson, 2012; 2014). As such, MFT professionals are valuable contributors to communities irrespective of location, and may have even more significant impact in low-income areas, including within 14 out of 15 total counties in Arizona where poverty rates rank considerably higher than the national rate (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019a; 2019b).

Despite the contributions that MFT professionals bring to communities, MFT professionals are underrepresented in Arizona, as the majority of degrees in mental health fields are not within MFT. The few MFT training programs in Arizona that are currently active are almost all within for-profit institutions, meaning that students interested in attending graduate school in MFT are often either paying high-cost tuition to remain in-state or going out-of-state for their training, with many not returning to Arizona to practice as they network for careers in the locations of their graduate institutions. Housing an MFT program at UArizona would boost availability of cost-effective mental health treatment statewide as many graduates from this program would likely remain in state as treatment providers. Additionally, this program will grant students with more affordable, high-quality MFT training that focuses on Arizona law and licensure while still providing students with flexibility for obtaining jobs around the country. This program will be an asset to communities and students in Arizona and nationally.

Employment prospects for graduates from this program are excellent. According to data on the national labor market (data from Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023), there is an expected 15% growth rate for jobs in MFT from 2022-2032, which is much faster job growth than average across occupations. Approximately 5,900 job openings are expected nationwide annually in MFT, for which our graduates would be highly qualified. As integrated healthcare becomes more common throughout the country, MFTs fill a unique mental healthcare provider role as they attend to family-based issues as part of an integrated team of providers. This growth in integrated care is promising for graduates in MFT. Currently, Arizona ranks as one of the states with a dearth of MFTs in relation to its population, with the number of employed MFTs considerably lower than the national average (Bureau of Labor Statistics,

2023). Accordingly, our proposed program would fill a void in the Arizona mental healthcare workforce and our graduates will be sought-after as professionals on the job market.

The University of Arizona student demand for the MFT program is also very high. In a survey of HDFS undergraduate students, 110 students reported that they would be interested or very interested in applying to a graduate MFT program at UArizona. The survey was only distributed within our own undergraduate major, and does not include potentially interested students from other fields of study such as psychology, sociology, communications, and more; this data also excludes students from other state institutions or from out-of-state. As such, the scope of potential applicants is very wide and we anticipate having more than enough students to meet enrollment goals. Additionally, the M.S. in Counseling program on UArizona campus informed us that they admit around 60 students per year but turn away at least 60 qualified students from their program every yearly application cycle. As such, there is room for an additional clinical mental health professional graduate program on our campus.

Similar Programs Offered at Arizona Public Universities:

List existing programs at Arizona public universities that deliver similar concepts and competencies to the proposed new program.

- The University of Arizona
 - Counseling, M.A.
 - Rehabilitation and Mental Health specialization
- Arizona State University
 - Marriage and Family Therapy, M.A.S.
 - Master of Counseling, M.C.
 - Master of Social Work, M.S.W
- Northern Arizona University
 - Clinical Mental Health Counseling, M.A.

Objection(s) Raised by Another Arizona Public University? NO

Has another Arizona public university lodged a written objection to the proposed program with the proposing university and the Board of Regents within seven days of receiving notice of the proposed program?

If Yes, Response to Objections:

Please provide details of how the proposing university has addressed the objection. If the objection remains unresolved, please explain why it is in the best interests of the university system and the state that the Board override it.

New Resources Required? (i.e. faculty and administrative positions; infrastructure, etc.):

We plan to hire one faculty member to start after the program receives approval to help build curriculum. Then, we plan to hire 1 to 2 additional faculty in subsequent semesters to teach the required courses. Those 2-3 hires, in addition to the two current faculty that can teach courses in the MFT program, will be able to cover all teaching needs.

We also plan to hire a graduate coordinator for the program during the first or second year. This staff position will serve as graduate coordinator and will help oversee clinical placements for student internships and work with students on tracking licensure requirements.

The Norton School has a strong and active donor base. These philanthropic donors have expressed tremendous interest in developing endowed scholarships to support students while pursuing their degree in Marriage and Family Therapy.

Plan to Request Program Fee/Differentiated Tuition? NO

Estimated Amount:

Program Fee Justification:

If planning to levy a program fee, please justify the estimated amount.

Note: The fee setting process requires additional steps, and forms need to be completed. Please work with your university and the ABOR Finance team (Leatta.McLaughlin@azregents.edu) to complete a fee request.

Specialized Accreditation? YES

Accreditor:

The name of the agency or entity from which accreditation will be sought

Arizona Board of Behavioral Health Examiners

After required 5-year period for national accreditation standards, accreditation will also be sought by the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE)—the national accreditation board for MFT educational institutions.