

MA Program in Counseling Psychology
(Specialization: Clinical Mental Health Counseling)

The MA Program in Counseling Psychology (Specialization: Clinical Mental Health Counseling) was established in 2005 by the Department of Psychology. From the start, the department's faculty had as its primary goal to offer a high-quality program with strong faculty and rigorous training program for its students. The main intent was to have a program that would enable graduates to provide the highest level of mental health services to the residents of Hawaii and beyond. In this pursuit of excellence, the program applied for and received the "established status" (jargon for permanent status) from the University of Hawaii System in 2009. This program review process within the University of Hawaii System served as an initial indicator that the program is of top quality. This then was followed by the program looking outward for assurance from an external accreditation agency regarding its top quality.

The MA Program had options as to which agency to apply for external accreditation. After a thorough review of potential organizations, the department faculty chose to pursue accreditation with the Masters in Psychology and Counseling Accreditation Council (MPCAC). MPCAC is an independent organization that has no financial or formal affiliation with other professional or trade associations and here is its mission statement:

The mission of the MPCAC is to accredit academic programs that provide science-based education and training in the practice of counseling and psychological services at the master's degree level, using both counseling and psychological principles and theories as they apply to specific populations and settings. Although programs may vary in the specific model of training and professional development utilized, commitment to science-based education is emphasized in the interest of providing services that are culturally responsive and that promote the public good.

The department faculty felt that this mission statement very well fit the nature of the MA Program in its use of both the existing psychological and counseling knowledge in developing the program and its curriculum. The MA Program was first accredited by the MPCAC in 2011 for a full 10-year accreditation and it is now pursuing a renewal of its accreditation in 2021.

As has always been the aim of the program to be the best program it can be, the accreditation with MPCAC offers an external validation of the quality of the program. The accreditation mechanism also offers the program opportunities to engage in continued evaluation of the program and its various facets (faculty, curriculum, clinical training, etc.) to improve on areas that can be further enhanced. As the student application pools increasingly becomes well versed and savvy in identifying high quality counselor training programs and the growing competition among the many programs in the country, the MA Program strongly believes that the MPCAC's accreditation provides the external validation and recognition that is needed to continue offering the best training in mental health counseling in Hawaii and elsewhere.