

TECHNICAL STANDARDS FOR TRAINING AS MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS
Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology (GSAPP)
March 2025

Earning a degree in a mental health profession requires mastery of a general body of knowledge and skills in specialty areas. Students of the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology (GSAPP) must acquire substantial competence as specified by our academic programs; must follow the professional guidelines of our respective fields as specified in the American Psychological Association's ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct (APA, 2017), and in the Behavior Analyst Certification Board's ethics code for behavior analysts (BACB, 2020), and must be able to relate appropriately to clients, patients, fellow students, faculty and staff members, community collaborators, supervisors, and other health care professionals. Combinations of cognitive, behavioral, emotional, intellectual, and communication abilities are required to perform these functions satisfactorily. These skills and functions are not only essential to the successful completion of the academic programs in mental health services; they are also necessary to ensure the health and safety of the aforementioned groups.

In addition to required academic achievement and proficiency, the Technical Standards described in this document set forth non-academic qualifications the GSAPP considers essential for successful completion of its curricula. Therefore, in order to be admitted to, to successfully progress through, and to be approved for internship, externship, and practicum sites and subsequent graduation from the GSAPP, applicants for admission and current students in the GSAPP must satisfy these Technical Standards. Students who are unable to meet these standards may be recommended for remediation or may be terminated from the program, consistent with policies articulated in the GSAPP Handbook.

I. Attitudinal, Behavioral, Interpersonal, and Emotional Attributes

Graduate students must be able to relate to clients, patients, fellow students, faculty and staff members, community collaborators, supervisors, and other health care professionals with honesty, integrity, and dedication in a non-discriminatory manner. They must be able to understand and use the power, special privileges, and trust inherent in the mental health profession's client or patient relationship for the client or patient's benefit and to know and avoid the behaviors that constitute misuse of this power. Graduate students must demonstrate the capacity to examine and deliberate effectively about the social and ethical questions that define mental health providers' roles and to reason critically about these questions. They must be able to identify personal reactions and responses, recognize multiple points of view, and integrate these appropriately into clinical and/or professional decision making. On research teams, graduate students must demonstrate the ability to interact appropriately with research participants, other students, and faculty and staff members. Graduate students must be able to collaborate well with others on joint projects (e.g., effectively accept and provide input).

A graduate student in a mental health profession must be of sufficient emotional health to use fully their intellectual ability, to exercise good judgment, to complete professional responsibilities promptly, and to relate to the aforementioned groups with courtesy, compassion, maturity, safety, and respect for dignity. The ability to participate collaboratively and flexibly as a member of an inter-professional team is essential.

Graduate students must display this emotional health in spite of multiple and varied academic, teaching, research, and personal responsibilities, in addition to clinical training expectations. Graduate students must be able to modify behavior in response to constructive criticism. They must be open to examining personal attitudes, perceptions, and stereotypes (especially those that may negatively impact client or patient care and professional relationships). Graduate students must be able to take responsibility for their behavior, which includes being open to feedback from their supervisors, academic instructors, and research advisors, and be able to modify their behavior in response to constructive feedback. Graduate students must be open and empathic with others and show respect for different viewpoints, perspectives, and opinions. They must strive to work collaboratively with others in the classroom, laboratory, clinic, and all other academic or professional settings. They must convey genuine interest in other people and demonstrate affect tolerance (i.e., appropriately manage and contain emotions in academic and professional settings). As an essential part of conducting research or clinical practice, graduate students effectively tolerate uncertainty and ambiguity. They must be emotionally mature (e.g., intellectually and emotionally open to, and appropriate when, receiving feedback). Graduate students must be able to advocate for their own needs in the workplace without being inappropriately aggressive. They must also seek the resources and build the relationships needed to advance in their academic or professional careers.

The study and ongoing practice of mental health provision often involves taxing workloads and appropriate management of stressful situations. Graduate students must have the stamina to maintain high levels of functioning in the face of multiple demands on their time and energy.

II. Intellectual Skills

Graduate students must possess a range of intellectual skills that allows them to master the broad and complex body of knowledge that comprises education in mental health provision. Graduate students must be able to critically evaluate their own and others' research, including the ability to identify limitations in the research literature or design of a specific study, to critique a manuscript as an ad hoc reviewer, and to "make sense" of their own data. They must be able to use theory to inform the conceptualization, design, and interpretation of research. Additionally, graduate students must be able to effectively understand the theoretical literature in their identified substantive research area, to appropriately discuss this literature in individual and group lab meetings, and to integrate their understanding into scientific writing and presentations. They must further demonstrate an ability to generate novel hypotheses and to design a study that follows from those hypotheses.

Graduate students must be able to analyze and synthesize information from a wide variety of sources and must demonstrate sophisticated critical thinking skills. They must be able to learn effectively through a variety of modalities including, but not limited to: classroom instruction, clinical supervision, small group discussion, individual study of materials, independent literature review, preparation and presentation of written and oral reports, and use of computer-based technology.

Because mental health provision is governed by the ethical principles set forth in the current ethics codes of the APA and the BACB, as well as by current state and federal laws, a graduate student must have the capacity to learn and understand these ethical standards and legal requirements and to perform consistent with these principles and mandates as a student in the GSAPP.

III. Communication Skills

Graduate students must be able to ask effective questions, to receive answers perceptively, to record information about clients or patients, and to provide effective psychoeducation to clients or patients. They must be able to communicate effectively and efficiently with clients, patients, fellow students, faculty and staff members, community collaborators, supervisors, and other health care professionals. This includes verbal and non-verbal communication (e.g., interpretation of facial expressions, emotions, and body language). Mastery of both written and spoken English is required, although applications from students with hearing and speech disabilities will be given full consideration. In such cases, use of a trained intermediary or other communications aide may be appropriate if this intermediary functions only as an information conduit and does not serve integrative or interpretive functions.

IV. Commitment to Non-Discrimination

The University is committed to equality of educational opportunity. The University does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, color, creed, disability, gender, gender expression, gender identity, genetic information, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, political views, or veteran status.

A graduate student with a diagnosed psychiatric disorder or other physical, mental, or emotional disability may participate in the GSAPP so long as the condition is managed sufficiently with or without reasonable accommodation to permit the student to satisfy the requirements of their academic program, including these Technical Standards. Students who seek reasonable accommodations for disabilities must contact the University's Office of Disability Services (ODS). The ODS will determine a student's eligibility for accommodations and recommend appropriate accommodations and services.

In the event of deteriorating function, it is essential that a graduate student be willing and able to acknowledge the need for and to accept professional help before the condition poses a danger to any members of the aforementioned groups.

V. References

American Psychological Association (2017). Ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/ethics/code/>

Behavior Analyst Certification Board. (2020). Ethics code for behavior analysts. Retrieved from <https://bacb.com/wp-content/ethics-code-for-behavior-analysts/>

The University's Non-Discrimination Statement – <https://uhr.rutgers.edu/non-discrimination-statement>

The University's Office of Disability Services – <https://ods.rutgers.edu/>