

The logo for Saint Mary's College of California features a large, light blue 'SMC' monogram in the background. Overlaid on this is a shield-shaped emblem containing a stylized 'G'. In the center of the logo, the words 'SAINT MARY'S' are written in a bold, red, sans-serif font, with 'COLLEGE OF CALIFORNIA' in a smaller, red, sans-serif font directly below it.

SAINT MARY'S
COLLEGE OF CALIFORNIA

To: Applicants for the Counseling Department

Re: *15 Personal and Professional Competencies of Student Counselors*

As an applicant, you are being provided with a copy of the 15 Personal and Professional Competencies at the time of your admissions interview (or as part of the admissions process). *Please read through the competencies carefully and acknowledge your understanding by electronically signing the [form](#) at the bottom of this document.* At this time, you do not need to fill out the form, only acknowledge that you have received a copy. If you have any questions or comments, please direct them to Courtney Gordon, Counseling Department Senior Administrative Assistant, at 925-631-4912 or cng4@stmarys-ca.edu.

The counseling core faculty members have developed a set of Personal and Professional Competencies that all of our students need to demonstrate for successful completion of the program. These competencies identify attitudes, skills, and behaviors that are essential for effective counselors. They serve as a benchmark for an ongoing, collaborative assessment process. A more formative assessment process allows our faculty and supervisory staff to provide our students a more standardized rubric for providing constructive feedback at various points throughout the program.

This signature page must be in your application file prior to conditional acceptance into the department. In the event you were unable to submit the signature page at the time of your admissions interview, please email Courtney Gordon at cng4@stmarys-ca.edu.

15 Personal & Professional Competencies of Counseling Department Student Counselors

(Final Draft, Approved by Core Faculty on 11/27/07, revised on 5/13/08, revised 4/22/09, Revised 8/06/09, Revised 7/7/2010, Revised for new admissions procedures 2/15/2012, Revised 7/24/13, Revised 7/4/18)

The faculty members in the Counseling Department at Saint Mary's College of California are committed to being competent counselor educators and to preparing students to be capable practitioners and agents for positive change on personal and professional levels. We believe in the principles defined and discussed below and we use these principles to inform our teaching and practice. Counseling students must be able to demonstrate basic counseling skills and be knowledgeable in a variety of counseling theories. Additionally, they must be able to integrate the learned skills with their own developed philosophical and theoretical constructs. Successful evaluation under these criteria is an integral part of students' progress through this program. The following *15 Personal and Professional Competencies* are related to the *2014 ACA Code of Ethics* (see summary of relevant sections at the end of this document). Each student will review and sign this document at admission; the document will also be used as part of an ongoing collaborative assessment process throughout coursework prior to the field placement and during field placement.

Personal & Professional Competencies 1-3: Counseling Skills & Abilities

Please rate the candidate using the following scale:

1 – Not present; 2 – Emerging; 3 – Competent; 4 –Exceptional

1. Student counselors demonstrate the following counseling skills *in the classroom*:
 - A. I am focused and attentive.
 - B. I am on time.
 - C. I actively listen to my instructors.
 - D. I actively listen to my classmates.
 - E. I demonstrate the ability to be self-reflective as a means of continual professional growth.
 - F. I demonstrate a willingness to self-disclose as a means of developing and enriching my counseling skills. Personal disclosure is an essential part of learning to become a counselor and is expected in many classes. Students are expected to exercise their healthy adult judgment in

deciding when and what to disclose. Self-disclosure is confidential unless one of the exceptions to confidentiality applies (i.e., harm to self or others or child/elder abuse).

2. Student counselors demonstrate the following counseling skills *in the field placement*:

- A. I create and/or adhere to professional clinical norms:
 - a. confidentiality
 - b. on time
 - c. appropriately attired
- B. I actively listen to my clients.
- C. I demonstrate the ability to be self-reflective as a means of continual professional growth.
- D. I demonstrate a willingness to self-disclose as a means of developing and enriching my counseling skills. I understand that my self-disclosure is always completely voluntary and confidential unless one of the exceptions to confidentiality applies (i.e., harm to self or others or child/elder abuse).

3. Student counselors develop and demonstrate competence in the fundamental counseling skills model taught in COUN 601 & 602:

At the end of COUN 602:

- A. a. I develop competence in all levels of the counseling skills model in training group sessions, including skills in "Involving/Attending," "Exploring/ Responding," "Understanding/Personalizing," and "Initiating/Acting."

At the end of the field experience courses:

- A. I demonstrate competence in all levels of the counseling skills model learned (as stated above) in supervised field experience settings.
- B. I demonstrate the ability to integrate these skills, along with relevant counseling theories, into my professional practice.

Personal & Professional Competencies 4-7: Professional Responsibility Please rate the candidate using the following scale:

1 – Not present; 2 – Emerging; 3 – Competent; 4 – Exceptional

4. Student counselors know and abide by professional codes of ethics (such as the 2014 ACA Code of Ethics), the Saint Mary's Honor Code, and civil laws; demonstrate professional

analysis and resolution of ethical issues; and relate to peers, professors, and clients in a manner consistent with professional standards.

- A. I demonstrate knowledge of professional codes of ethics as assessed in relevant courses.
- B. I consistently demonstrate professional conduct, as defined by the 2014 ACA Code of Ethics, interactions with peers, professors and clients.
- C. I am available and open to discuss interactions or behaviors with peers, professors, supervisors, and clients that are not consistent with the professional codes of ethics.

5. Student counselors demonstrate sensitivity to real and ascribed differences of client and counselor roles, and manage role differences professionally and ethically.

In the classroom:

- A. I understand that I may explore ideas, concepts, attitudes and feelings freely as long as it is done respectfully and is appropriate to the subject matter of the class session.
- B. I am available and open to discussion with faculty should I demonstrate a lack of understanding in the differentiation between the client & counselor role.

In the field placement:

- A. I demonstrate the ability to maintain a professional role as a counselor in field placement settings.
- B. I demonstrate the ability to set and maintain boundaries between client and counselor. *[Note: Corey & Corey (2003) describe boundaries in terms of the "need for helpers to be honest and self-searching in determining the impact of their behavior on clients" (p. 254).]*
- C. I am available and open to discussion with my site supervisor should I demonstrate a lack of understanding in the differentiation between the client & counselor role.

6. The field placement setting is a learning laboratory in which students are not yet accomplished practitioners. However, student counselors should demonstrate the ability to match interventions to the presenting clinical profile in a theoretically consistent manner. Student counselors should also provide only those services and apply only those techniques for which they are qualified, or are in the process of being qualified, through education, training, and experience. Of significant importance is the ability of the student to recognize limitations and request help from either the field supervisor or the Saint Mary's Field Experience Seminar (COUN 791) instructor.

- A. In the field experience courses, through discussion or in role playing, I am able to match interventions that are consistent with the presenting clinical profile.

- B. In the field placement, I apply relevant techniques and services to the situation.
 - C. I am available and open to discussion of conduct in class or in field placement that does not demonstrate this ability.
7. Student counselors advocate for the protection of their clients and demonstrate respect for individual differences, including those related to age, gender, race/ ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language, class, and socioeconomic status. Respect refers to the ability to value and hold individual differences in high regard. Advocacy refers to being proactive on behalf of clients' individual needs and rights. Student counselors will be able to identify their own beliefs, values and prejudices and be aware of how these may interfere with understanding a client's values, beliefs and behavior.
- A. I have worked effectively with my clients, with an awareness of and emerging cultural competencies related to gender, race, national origin, sexual orientation, religion, class, etc., and have demonstrated an ability to advocate on their behalf.
 - B. I have demonstrated an ability to work with my clients and not let my own beliefs reduce my effectiveness in my interactions with clients.
 - C. I am able to recognize my own beliefs, talk about them in an
 - D. objective manner, and recognize how my beliefs may not necessarily be shared by others, without these differences compromising my ability to advocate for my clients.

Personal & Professional Competencies 8-15: Personal Responsibility Please rate the candidate using the following scale:

1 – Not present; 2 – Emerging; 3 – Competent; 4 – Exceptional

8. Student counselors demonstrate an awareness of their own belief system, values, needs, and limitations and the effect of these on personal and professional conduct.
- In the classroom:
- A. I demonstrate the ability to reflect on attitudes toward prospective clients or students.
- In the field placement:
- A. I demonstrate the ability to reflect on attitudes toward clients or students.
 - B. I am able to respectfully disagree with another, to discuss issues objectively without becoming overly emotionally engaged, and to accept constructive help from others.
 - C. I am open to considering the suggestion from a supervisor that a personal belief may interfere with understanding a client/student.

9. Student counselors demonstrate the ability to receive, integrate, and to utilize feedback from peers, faculty, trainers, and supervisors.
- A. During coursework such as COUN 601/602/791, I am able to accept feedback from students, trainers, and supervisors.
 - B. I am able to accept and integrate feedback when working on submitted tapes in supervision.
 - C. I use feedback from supervisors in the field experience and demonstrate the ability to act on that feedback.
10. Student counselors demonstrate appropriate conduct on campus and at their field sites. *(Also refer to the Saint Mary's College Graduate and Professional Studies Handbook and the Code of Conduct for guidelines regarding behavioral standards and consequences on campus.)*
- A. My classroom conduct is respectful with regard to attendance, assignments, respect for another student's opinion, and positive regard for others.
 - B. I demonstrate respectful conduct during interactions with others in more casual situations, such as talking to SOE office personnel and/or field placement personnel.
 - C. I maintain professional interaction with instructors and/or peers and am able to contain issues of a more personal confidential matter until a meeting can be set to discuss these issues with an instructor or advisor.
 - D. I am responsive to an instructor's request that I contain issues until such a meeting can be arranged.
11. Student counselors are dependable regarding assignments, attendance and deadlines.
- A. I meet with my advisor at least once per year and follow my recommended plan of study.
 - B. My attendance meets the requirements for my courses and for the Graduate and Professional Studies Handbook policies.
 - C. I regularly turn in my assignments on time.
12. Student counselors have an accurate assessment of their own personal and professional competencies and take responsibility for their personal and professional conduct.
- A. I discuss with field experience supervisors my ongoing development in the 15 Personal and Professional Competencies.
 - B. I discuss with my Counseling Department supervisor my level of personal and professional competencies with regard to tape/skills supervision.
 - C. I understand that I will not be able to register for the field experience courses until I have satisfactorily met the relevant competencies through

an ongoing, collaborative process of self-assessment and faculty assessment.

- D. I acknowledge areas for continued professional or personal growth.
- E. I demonstrate the ability to be open to feedback and to respond with appropriate behavior change.
- F. I am open to balanced feedback regarding discrepancies between my self-assessment and the assessments by others.

13. Student counselors exhibit appropriate levels of self-assurance and confidence. *Note: The field placement is the capstone experience in all of the counseling specializations. Student counselors may experience a lack of self-assurance and confidence as they begin their field experience and/or School Psychology internship. This is part of the natural development of counselors.*

In the classroom:

- A. I am able to participate in discussion of issues and to make classroom presentations.
- B. I ask questions and seek help when a required action is unclear.

In the field placement:

- A. My conduct will reflect a beginning level of self-assurance and confidence and such conduct will become more observably confident as the year of field experience unfolds.
- B. I ask questions and seek help when a required action is unclear.
- C. I demonstrate the ability to be decisive and act on behalf of my clients.

14. Student counselors express thoughts and feelings effectively both orally and in writing.
- A. I demonstrate the ability to express thoughts and feelings during class discussion.
 - B. I demonstrate the ability to express thoughts and feelings in written class assignments, as defined by individual standards in course syllabi.
 - C. I demonstrate the ability to meaningfully discuss issues that emerge in tape supervision and field experience.
15. Student counselors demonstrate the ability to manage the stressors of a demanding profession by developing effective coping skills that include professional and personal support systems.
- A. Despite the anxiety and stress I may feel as I begin my field placement, I show up each day, see my clients, and seek to learn daily about the site.
 - B. In field placement, I use my supervisor as a guide and as a source of support, especially in new situations, in a situation that requires an

- immediate response, and in crisis situations.
- C. I am able to ask for help to manage a stressful situation.
 - D. I use peers as resources and learn to consult with others.
 - E. I can state coping strategies when asked to in the field experience seminar journals.
 - F. I demonstrate the ability to respect the boundaries (see definition in #5d above) of others and I am able to maintain personal boundaries.

(Adapted from the "Personal and Professional Competencies" developed by the Department of Counseling and School Psychology, College of Education, Seattle University, as cited in Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 2007)

The ACA Code of Ethics

The *ACA Code of Ethics* (American Counseling Association, 2014) includes several references to the mutual responsibilities between students and faculty in counselor education programs with regard to personal and professional competencies. The following Sections of this code apply to the 15 Personal and Professional Competencies:

Section F.7.b. Self-Growth Experiences: Counselor education programs delineate requirements for self-disclosure or self-growth experiences in their admission and program materials. Counselor educators use professional judgment when designing training experiences they conduct that require student and supervisee self-growth or self disclosure. Students and supervisees are made aware of the ramifications their self disclosure may have when counselors whose primary role as teacher, trainer, or supervisor requires acting on ethical obligations to the profession. Evaluative components of experiential training experiences explicitly delineate predetermined academic standards that are separate and do not depend on the student's level of self-disclosure. Counselor educators may require trainees to seek professional help to address any personal concerns that may be affecting their competency.

Section F.8.b Impairment: Counselors in training refrain from offering or providing counseling services when their physical, mental, or emotional problems are likely to harm a client or others. They are alert to the signs of impairment, seek assistance for problems, and notify their program supervisors when they are aware that they are unable to effectively provide services. In addition, they seek appropriate professional services for themselves to remediate problems that are interfering with their ability to provide services to others.

Section F.9.a. Evaluation: Counselors (i.e., counselor educators and supervisors) clearly state to students, prior to and throughout the training program, the levels of competency expected, appraisal methods, and timing of evaluations for both didactic and clinical competencies.

Section F.9.b. Limitations: Counselor educators, throughout their ongoing evaluation and appraisal, are aware of and address the inability of some students to achieve counseling

competencies that might impede performance. Counselor educators:

1. Assist students in securing remedial assistance when needed,
2. Seek professional consultation and document their decision to dismiss or refer students for assistance, and
3. Ensure that students have recourse in a timely manner to address decisions to require them to seek assistance or to dismiss them and provide students with due process according to institutional policies and procedures.

Other relevant sections of the *ACA Code of Ethics*: Section C, Professional Responsibility, Section D Relationships with Other Professionals, and Section H Resolving Ethical Issues.

Additional sources:

Corey, M. S., & Corey, G. (2010). *Becoming a helper*. Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Corey, G., Corey, M. S., & Callanan, P. (2010). *Issues & ethics in the helping professions*. Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Admissions: By signing below, I am certifying that I have read the 15 Personal and Professional Competencies, and I understand that this document will be used as part of an ongoing, collaborative assessment process throughout the program, and that I will need to have met all competencies for the successful completion of the program:

Please sign this [form](#) electronically acknowledging receipt.