

# MFT Program Goals, Student Learning Outcomes, Targets, and Assessment Measures

## VSU Mission

**Student Mission.** To provide a diverse student population with an inspired education, a safe learning environment, a nurturing community, and a wealth of experience that assists students in molding their futures in a creative, conscious, and caring fashion while preparing them to be lifelong learners who will meet the needs of a changing global society.

**University Mission.** To operate the university with a focus toward human, environmental, and financial sustainability while increasing value to our local, regional, national, and international stakeholders. To expand opportunities for our students, employees, and varied community members by promoting social justice and service learning.

**Regional Mission.** To provide our region and our home with the resources and support necessary to develop and sustain a higher quality of living, greater economic and community development, and inspired innovation that nurtures and respects our diverse population and beautiful environment while promoting academic outreach, public and private entrepreneurship, and collaboration with all regional entities.

## MFT Program Mission

In concert with the Valdosta State University mission and its embrace of service learning, safety, respect, community collaboration, creativity, social justice, and sustainability, the mission of the Marriage and Family Therapy Program is to provide students with in-depth knowledge and understanding of the interconnected, interrelated, and systemic nature of the world, particularly as these pertain to the formation and resolution of human problems. This systems-theoretical knowledge base forms the epistemological foundation upon which students acquire an MFT identity and develop the clinical skills necessary to therapeutic practice that is ethical, grounded in research, multi-culturally competent, and readies students for employment in a variety of mental health settings with a diverse range of clients.

## MFT Program Goals

### Program Goal 1. Diversity

The program will demonstrate that graduates consider ethnicity, race, gender, socioeconomic status, and culture in clinical work.

### Program Goal 2. Knowledge

The program will demonstrate that graduates have a master's level understanding of systems theory, relational/contextual thinking, and the ability to apply a systems/relational orientation to the assessment and treatment of clients.

### Program Goal 3. Practice

The program will demonstrate that graduates have the clinical competencies and personal qualities necessary to gain employment in a variety of mental health settings.

### Program Goal 4. Professional MFT Identity

The program will demonstrate graduate readiness to assume the identity of a professional Marriage and Family Therapist

### Program Goal 5. Research

The program will demonstrate student understanding of the way research informs relational family therapy treatment.

### Program Goal 6. Ethics

The program will demonstrate that graduates understand and apply a systemic ethic and the AAMFT Code of Ethics to clinical work.

These program goals are informed by five developmental competencies identified by COAMFTE (Accreditation Standards 12.5):

- Knowledge of the MFT profession
- Practice of relational/systemic therapy as a qualified behavioral/mental health provider
- Commitment to ethical practice through ethical codes of the MFT profession and pertinent regulatory bodies
- Awareness, knowledge and skill to responsibly serve diverse communities
- Development and application of research to further the knowledge and practice of the MFT profession.

## VSU MFT Program Student Learning Outcomes

SLO 1. Practice from a multi-culturally sensitive lens

SLO 2. Practice from a systemic lens

SLO 3. Be prepared to obtain entry-level employment in mental health settings

SLO 4. Claim the professional identity of a Marriage and Family Therapist

SLO 5. Recognize the ways research informs relational family therapy treatment

SLO 6. Practice informed by ethics

## Alignment Between PGs, SLOs, Targets, and Assessment Mechanisms

The University mission, MFT program mission, MFT Program Goals (PGs), and program's Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) are linked. The PGs are aligned with the university mission and competencies in the areas of **diversity, knowledge, practice, MFT identity, research, and ethics**. Each PG has several SLOs, which are assessed by identified assessment mechanisms (also known as course requirements, such as exams, papers, projects, presentations, etc.). Aggregated scores from assessment mechanisms determine whether established targets and SLOs have been met. With this data, the program can determine where and what kind of improvements can be made. Here, then, are the MFT Program's PGs, SLOs, targets, and assessment mechanisms:

### Program Goal 1. Diversity

The program will demonstrate that graduates consider ethnicity, race, gender, socioeconomic status, and culture in clinical work.

#### SLO 1: Practice from a multi-culturally<sup>1</sup> sensitive lens

##### Targets & Assessment Mechanisms for Benchmarks

1. 80% of students will earn a minimum score of 75% on the Privilege Project in *MFTH 7050 Diversity, Inclusion, and Social Justice*.
2. 80% of students will earn a minimum score of 75% on the Public Conversations Project Reflection Paper in *MFTH 6900: Foundations of Family Therapy*.
3. 80% of students will earn a minimum average score of 3 across three continuous semesters on diversity items (2, 29, and 53) and (4, 31, 55) of the *Practicum Evaluation* in *MFTH 7600 Practicum*.

### Program Goal 2. Knowledge

The program will demonstrate that graduates have a master's level understanding of systems theory, relational/contextual thinking, and the ability to apply a systems/relational orientation to the assessment and treatment of clients.

#### SLO 2: Practice from a systemic lens

##### Targets & Assessment Mechanisms for Benchmarks

1. 80% of students will earn a minimum score of 75% on the *Systems Theory final exam or paper* in *MFTH 6800 Relational Theory, Practice, and Ethics*.
2. 80% of students will earn a minimum score of 75% on the Clinical Case Presentation (evaluated through genogram, systemic hypothesis, and content/process distinction) in *MFTH 7601 Treatment Issues in MFT*.
3. 80% of students will earn a minimum average score of 3 for items (5, 32, 56), (6, 33, 57), and (7, 34, 58) concerning clinical systemic thinking on the *Practicum Evaluation* used in *MFTH 7600: Practicum in MFT*.

### Program Goal 3. Practice

The program will demonstrate that students possess the clinical competencies and personal qualities necessary to gain employment in a variety of mental health settings.

#### SLO 3: Obtain entry-level employment in mental health settings

##### Targets & Assessment Mechanisms for Benchmarks

1. 80% of students will earn a minimum score of 75% on the *Encountering Difference Project* in *MFTH 7500: Development in the Family System*.
2. 80% of students will earn a minimum score of 75% on the Comprehensive Exam I
3. 80% of students will earn a minimum score of 3 for items 28, 51, 62 concerning independent work on the *Practicum Evaluation* used in *MFTH 7600: Practicum in MFT*.

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<sup>1</sup> The term "multi-cultural" embraces a wide range of diversity concerns, issues, and identities including but not limited to religion and spirituality, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation and affiliation, ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, family history, physical ability, immigration status, and nationality.

#### Program Goal 4. Professional MFT Identity

The program will demonstrate readiness to assume the identity of a professional Marriage and Family Therapist

##### SLO 4: Students will claim the professional identity of a Marriage and Family Therapist

###### Targets & Assessment Mechanisms

1. 80% of students will respond with a 5 or greater on the SLO survey question concerning MFT Identity.
2. 80% of students will earn a minimum average score of 3 for items 17, 42, 65 and items 18, 43, and 66, concerning professional identity on the *Practicum Evaluation* used in *MFTH 7600: Practicum in MFT*.
3. 80% of students will earn a minimum score of 75% on the Comprehensive Exam II.

#### Program Goal 5. Research

The program will demonstrate student understanding of the ways research informs relational family therapy treatment.

##### SLO 5: Recognize the ways research informs relational family therapy treatment

###### Targets & Assessment Mechanisms for Benchmarks

1. 80% of students will earn a minimum of 75% on the *Qualitative Research Project*
2. in *MFTH 7200: Research in MFT*.
3. 80% of students will earn a minimum of 75% on the *Diagnosis and Disorder Group Presentation* in *MFTH 7400 Psychopathology & Psychopharmacology in MFT*.
4. 80% of students will earn a minimum score of 3 on their narrative response to the Comprehensive Exam II question concerning the ways research shapes the field of family therapy. (p. 5, item 5, SLO 5).

#### Program Goal 6. Ethics

The program will demonstrate that graduates understand and apply systemic ethics and the AAMFT Code of Ethics to clinical work.

##### SLO 6: Practice informed by ethics

###### Targets & Assessment Mechanisms for Benchmarks

1. 80% of students will earn a minimum of 75% on the *Portfolio* in *MFTH 7350 Legal Issues in MFT*.
2. 80% of students will earn a minimum of 75% on the *Ethics Quiz* in *MFTH 7880: Professional Ethics Seminar*.
3. 80% of students will earn a minimum average score of 3 for practice items 27, 50, 74 concerning a systemic ethic on the *Practicum Evaluation* used in *MFTH 7600: Practicum in MFT*.

## Putting It All Together: An Outcome-Based Education Framework of PGs, SLO's, Targets, and Assessment Mechanisms

The above description of the university and program mission, goals, and outcomes is a description of an outcome-based (OBE) education. As defined by COAMFTE, an OBE is:

*a framework where the focus is on the assessment of program outcomes (empirical measures of student achievement at the student and program level) rather than on the assessment of inputs (such as coursework and resources available to students). The primary focus of assessment is evaluating a program's goals and outcomes based solely on specific measures of student competency. (Accreditation Standards, Version 12.5, p. 37)*

In other words, rather than courses consisting of a class working its way through a book, chapter-by-chapter, the program establishes program goals (PGs), which are linked to actions—student learning outcomes (SLOs)—which are linked to targets and operationalized using assessment measures.

By reading from #1 at the bottom of the next page up to #5, you can see how the program's mission, PGs, SLO's, targets, and assessment mechanisms intertwine and come together to shape and inform each other.

5. When the program has achieved all its PGs, it can demonstrate that it has met the benchmarks established by COAMFTE.
4. Each SLO is paired with a PG. As targets associated with an SLO are met and the SLO is said to have been achieved, then the program can say that the program goal (PG) associated with the SLO has been achieved. PGs address six broad areas, five of which are required for accreditation: Diversity, Knowledge, Practice, MFT Identity (not COAMFTE required), Research, and Ethics.
3. Targets are linked to SLOs. When aggregated target data indicate that target criteria have been met, the program can say that it has successfully taught what the course claims to teach. This means that the program is able to say that it has fulfilled a part of a student learning outcome (SLO). We say "*part of an SLO is fulfilled*" because each SLO has three to five targets. All targets associated with a given SLO must be met in order to say that the SLO has been successfully achieved.
2. With the successful completion of each assessment measure, you pass course milestones, called targets. Targets indicated levels of achievement all students in a given course. A target, for example, might be something like this: "At least 80% of students in the class will get 75% or better on a 5-point exam question about systemic ethics." When you and your classmates collectively produce a score of 75% or better, then the Program can say that the target has been met.
1. Beginning at the smallest level and working up to the most encompassing

level: Every course in the curriculum has objectives. An example of a course objective might be that students are able to recognize the difference between Structural family therapy and Narrative family therapy. To test whether you have learned this, your professor asks you to complete certain assessment measures (an exam, a paper, a project, a presentation, etc.). Some assessment measures are selected as targets. When targets are met, students have demonstrated learning outcome achievement.

This is a visual map of the circular relationships between assessment mechanisms, targets, SLOs, PGs, and accreditation described above.

