MARITAL AND FAMILY THERAPY PROGRAM

The Marital and Family Therapy (MFT) program prepares students to become marriage and family therapists. Marriage and family therapists are trained to conceptualize mental health and behavior problems as existing within interpersonal relationships. Consequently, students are trained to treat problems within a person’s current interpersonal context. In addition to training in the most prominent marriage and family therapy theories, students are exposed to the biological and intrapsychic approaches to problem development and resolution. Students receive training in the assessment and treatment of the major mental disorders.

The MFT program is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Marital and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE). The COAMFTE is the national organization recognized by the U.S. Department of Education for setting standards for marriage and family therapy education. USD’s MFT program is one of only seven master’s degree-granting programs in California accredited by the COAMFTE.

Graduates of the MFT program usually work in mental health agencies. However, some set up their own private practices or go on to doctoral work. The degree fulfills the educational requirements for licensure in California as a Marriage and Family Therapist and usually meets the licensing requirements in the other 49 states with Marriage and Family Therapist licensure.

General Degree Requirements

The MA in MFT is a non-thesis degree program requiring the successful completion of 60 units of graduate coursework, a written comprehensive exam, completion of an approved international experience and the accumulation of a minimum of 500 client contact hours and 100 supervision hours. The majority of the students are full-time. Full-time students can complete the program within two full calendar years. Part-time students must take at least six units per semester.

Additional Admission Requirements

See the Admission page for basic admission requirements. See the Credential page for credential requirements.

Interview

After an initial review of applications to the Marital and Family Therapy program, the most qualified candidates will be invited to USD for a group interview with the MFT faculty. Applicants who live outside California and surrounding states (Arizona, Oregon, Washington, Utah, or Nevada) will have the option of participating in a phone interview. However, out-of-state applicants are strongly encouraged to attend the on-campus group interview, if possible.

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Electives

Take one of the following:

- MFTS 542 Families of Children with Special Needs
- MFTS 572 Gender Issues in Family Therapy
- MFTS 573 Group Therapy
- MFTS 576 Self of the Therapist

Degree Requirements

Comprehensive Examination

Successful completion of a comprehensive examination is required for graduation. The exam is taken in the second year and covers three areas: Theory & Application, Assessment, and Law & Ethics. Students are given two hours to complete each section.
Clinical Contact Hours
Students must successfully complete a total of 500 clinical contact hours (minimum of 200 relational hours) and 100 supervision hours (minimum of 50 with raw data) while enrolled in Practicum.

Completion of Prerequisite Requirements
Students must complete the three prerequisite requirements (Human Development, Research Methods and either Counseling Theories or Theories of Personality) either prior to enrollment in the program or before the beginning of their second semester in the program.

Practicum In MFT
An important part of the training program is the practical experience and training students receive during the clinical practicum. The MFT faculty maintains a variety of sites that meet the rigorous clinical hour and supervision requirements. Practicum placements are typically non-paying positions.

Practicum (MFTS 595P, MFTS 596P, MFTS 597P) is a 12-month, three-semester sequence that is completed during the student’s final year in the program. During this clinically rich experience, students will be expected to complete 500 direct client-contact hours, 200 of which need to be with couples or families. Students receive a minimum of 100 hours of supervision from MFT faculty during this time, in addition to the supervision received from on-site supervisors. Faculty supervision is in both individual and group format, with live and videotaped data being used as the primary source of session information.

International Requirement
At SOLES, all masters and doctoral students participate in an international experience designed to support the growth of cultural competency. Our goal is to inform best practices in working with culturally diverse populations locally, nationally and globally. International experiences are approved by each student’s faculty advisor and can be credit based or non-credit based activities.

MFTS 365 | CURRENT APPROACHES TO PEER ASSISTANCE
Units: 3
Students taking this course will learn about the practical application of theoretical concepts and empirical data related to student wellness, academic success, adaptation to college and peer counseling. Examples of college student areas to explore include substance abuse, academic and learning skill development, relationship management, and theories related to college student development, persistence and success. Students will learn basic counseling skills, (e.g., encouraging, paraphrasing, reflecting, summarizing, confronting), campus and community resources, crisis intervention, ethics, diversity dimensions, and skills to apply this knowledge as peer counselors. Students currently enrolled in, or who have successfully completed this course will be eligible to apply for peer program positions offered by the university.

MFTS 366 | APPLIED EXPERIENCE IN PEER ASSISTANCE
Units: 2 Repeatability: Yes (Can be repeated for Credit)
Prerequisites: MFTS 365
This course is an innovative and collaborative partnership between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs. It will provide peer support and peer counseling for USD students. Track one students will serve as peer coaches for students identified “at-risk” (e.g., students on academic probation, those who have received mid-term deficiency grades, or have been identified though early intervention alert systems; collaboration through the Center for Student Success and Student Wellness). Track two students will provide peer education and support regarding sexual violence (collaboration through the Women’s Center and Student Wellness). Undergraduate students selected for this course through an application procedure (MFTS 365 – Current Approaches to Peer Assistance is a prerequisite).

MFTS 400 | INTRODUCTION TO MARITAL AND FAMILY THERAPY
Units: 3
Introduction to the theories and methods of marital and family therapy through lecture, discussion, and experiential activities. This course is designed for students interested in pursuing careers in mental health services and medicine.

MFTS 500 | RESEARCH IN FAMILY THERAPY
Units: 3 Repeatability: No
By the end of the class, the student will have the motivation, knowledge and skills necessary to use research successfully in a variety of ways in their clinical work.

MFTS 523 | FAMILY THERAPY THEORIES I
Units: 3 Repeatability: No
Students are exposed to the fundamental assumptions and ideas of general systems theory and the basic premises of the various theoretical orientations within the family therapy field. Family theories I covers Structural Family Therapy, Strategic Family Therapy, Bowen Family Therapy, and Behavioral Family Therapy.

MFTS 524 | FAMILY THERAPY THEORIES II
Units: 3 Repeatability: No
Students are exposed to the fundamental assumptions and ideas of general systems theory, and the basic premises of the various theoretical orientations within the family therapy field. Family Theories II covers Experiential family therapies, Narrative Therapy, Solution-focused Therapy, Internal Family Systems Therapy, and the process of theory integration.

MFTS 528 | PSYCHOPATHOLOGY IN THE FAMILY
Units: 3 Repeatability: No
An examination of the developmental factors that lead to the emergence and maintenance of various psychological and interpersonal disorders. Emphasis is on developing skills in recognizing inappropriate and maladaptive behaviors and in selecting appropriate techniques for counseling and referral. The course focuses on integrating psychopathology and family diagnosis.

MFTS 529 | ETHICAL, LEGAL, & PROFESSIONAL ISSUES IN FAMILY THERAPY
Units: 3 Repeatability: No
An examination of the most important areas of legal, ethical, and professional concern to marriage and family therapists and other mental health practitioners in California. Among the topics covered are: confidentiality; psychotherapist-patient privilege; child, elder and dependent adult abuse; reporting laws; treating dangerous patients; treating minors with and without parental consent; dual relationship issues; selected areas of family law, licensing law and regulations, scope of practice issues; ethical standards of the MFT profession; and professional identity.

MFTS 532 | HUMAN DIVERSITY IN FAMILY THERAPY
Units: 3 Repeatability: No
Issues related to various ethnic and cultural backgrounds are examined, including the influence of minority characteristics, racism and discrimination in the therapeutic process. Emphasis is placed on the interplay between social issues and the therapeutic process.

MFTS 533 | FAMILY DEVELOPMENT
Units: 3 Repeatability: No
This course uses a biopsychosocial, systemic framework to examine various topics central to families and their development across the life span. The course examines a wide range of developmental issues important to understanding family functioning (mate selection, marriage, parenting, divorce), with special attention on diversity in family types (stepfamilies, single-parent families, immigrant families). An emphasis will be placed on the clinical application of concepts.
MFTS 541 | SYSTEMIC TREATMENT OF CHILDREN  
Units: 3  Repeatability: No  
The study of the major methods used to assess and treat child and adolescent problems from an integrated systemic/developmental perspective. The treatment of both normative and non-normative developmental problems in children and adolescents is emphasized.

MFTS 542 | FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS  
Units: 1  Repeatability: No  
When parents are confronted with the news that their child has a disability, life changes immediately, dramatically and permanently. Families with a child who has a disability or who is chronically ill confront challenges and bear burdens unknown to other families and, at times, unknown to the professionals who are entrusted with the responsibility of providing services and support. In addition to having to learn how to adjust to and cope with a new reality after receiving a diagnosis, families need also to learn how to access and navigate a number of systems of care including the medical, mental health and educational systems, as well as a host of government agencies such as the Regional Center and Social Security.

MFTS 543 | DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOPATHOLOGY  
Units: 3  Repeatability: No  
This course presents key concepts and theories in child and adolescent development. The course addresses both normative development and developmental psychopathology. Developmental concepts are discussed in relationship to the family context and how these concepts can inform clinical work with children and families. Prerequisite: An undergraduate course in human development.

MFTS 544 | PSYCHOPHARMACOLOGY AND SYSTEMS  
Units: 2  Repeatability: No  
Prerequisites: MFTS 528 with a minimum grade of C-  
An introduction to medication and its use in treating mental disorders. Students learn how medications function in managing mental disorders and the positive and negative effects of these medications on human functioning. A psychoeducational perspective is used to integrate the family systems perspective with biological considerations.

MFTS 546 | COUPLES AND SEX THERAPY  
Units: 3  Repeatability: No  
The study of the major methods used to assess and treat couple problems, with an emphasis on sexual issues and the treatment of sexual disorders. Both behavioral and nonbehavioral methods and strategies are presented.

MFTS 562 | RECOVERY-ORIENTED CASE MANAGEMENT  
Units: 1  Repeatability: No  
This course will focus on the components and principles of Recovery Oriented Case Management. The course will examine the strength based, client centered advocacy and resiliency models in Recovery Oriented Case Management. The course will look at various systems of care including community, public, and private mental health and social services including how they can support Recovery Oriented Case Management. The course will address how diversity, socio-economic status, and poverty may affect, and be affected by, the implementation of Recovery Oriented Case Management. The course will examine how marriage & family therapists in their clinical practice can use Recovery-oriented Case Management to more fully serve and benefit Individuals, Couples, and Families.

MFTS 563 | COLLABORATIVE CARE  
Units: 1  Repeatability: No  
This course examines various models of collaborative care and the clinical competencies and skills MFT’s need to work successfully on collaborative care teams. This course will also examine the biopsychosocial/spiritual aspects of illness and how MFT’s can assess and manage common mental health, psychosocial, and health behavior issues in primary care settings and recovery oriented practice environments. Contextual issues such as race/ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, religion, and socioeconomic status (SES) and how they inform collaborative care practices will also be discussed.

MFTS 566 | INDIVIDUAL, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY TRAUMA  
Units: 1  Repeatability: No  
This course is designed to introduce students to how trauma affects individuals, families, and communities, including the nature of trauma (e.g., abuse, combat, natural disasters), grief reactions, and traumatic stress. Also included in this class is an exploration of the therapist’s response to trauma, crisis intervention, comorbid disorders and general treatment issues. Students will review evidence-based practices in the trauma field. The instructor uses a culturally-informed perspective to teach the class.

MFTS 570 | SYSTEMIC TREATMENT OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE  
Units: 2  Repeatability: No  
A critical evaluation of the complex and sometimes contradictory information available in drug and alcohol abuse treatment. A biopsychosocial model of organization is presented along with both individual and family assessment, diagnosis and treatment techniques.

MFTS 571 | FAMILY VIOLENCE  
Units: 1  Repeatability: No  
This course will focus on the dynamics, assessments and interventions regarding family violence and child abuse. The course will examine theories, multiple assessments, treatments & interventions, as well as social & scientific controversies regarding family violence and child abuse. The course will encourage self reflection regarding the definition, function, & various experiences of abuse and violence in society and the family. The course will address gender and cultural issues regarding both victims and perpetrators of family violence and child abuse. The course will examine how marriage & family therapists in their clinical practice can assess for and treat families experiencing violence and abuse.

MFTS 572 | GENDER ISSUES IN FAMILY THERAPY  
Units: 1  Repeatability: No  
Gender issues and their impact on societal norms and values, the development of problems and the process of therapeutic intervention are examined.

MFTS 573 | GROUP THERAPY  
Units: 1  Repeatability: No  
The ability to work with groups is increasingly becoming an essential skill for family therapists. This course will provide a survey of types of groups in clinical practice. Students will be exposed to a variety of group experiences to enrich their understanding of group structures and dynamics.

MFTS 574 | AGING ISSUES IN FAMILY THERAPY  
Units: 1  Repeatability: No  
Issues relevant to family therapists working with adults in later life and their families are addressed. Special attention is given to assessment skills, including intergenerational history and patterns, ethnicity, SES, gender and cultural factors. Common life-cycle issues, such as retirement, are addressed, as are problems experienced by a significant number of elderly people, including illness, long-term care and loss.
MFTS 575 | SOCIAL NEUROSCIENCE FOR FAMILY THERAPISTS
Units: 1  Repeatability: No
Social Neuroscience seeks to understand the psychological and biological bases of social behavior. How does the brain support our social relationships and how do our social experiences affect the brain, body and physical health? Family life is a primary incubator for brain development, especially for children. In this course, topics such as attachment, stress and coping, empathy, emotional regulation, family emotional environment and aging will be explored with a focus on application of research findings into clinical interventions.

MFTS 576 | SELF OF THE THERAPIST
Units: 1  Repeatability: No
This experiential learning course focuses on the student’s own family experiences and the impact of these experiences on the student’s work as a family therapist.

MFTS 577 | TREATMENT OF SEVERE MENTAL ILLNESS
Units: 3  Repeatability: No
The purpose of this course is to teach MFT students effective strategies for the treatment of severe mental illness through a balanced exploration of current trends in treatment planning and delivery, research and outcomes, various theoretical perspectives and the specific needs of this unique population of clients. An emphasis will be placed on principles of mental health recovery-oriented care and methods of service delivery in recovery-oriented practice environments.

MFTS 578 | SPIRITUAL ISSUES IN FAMILY THERAPY
Units: 1  Repeatability: No
Spiritual issues and their impact on the treatment of marital and family therapy problems are examined. The importance of individual and family spiritual development in its various forms is emphasized.

MFTS 579 | SOLES EXPERIMENTAL TOPICS
Units: 1-3 Repeatability: Yes (Can be repeated for Credit)
This course number is used by SOLES for experimental topics courses. The title and content of each 579 course will vary by topic and program/department. If more than one 579 course is offered during a single semester, section numbers will allow for identification of the course.

MFTS 595P | PRACTICUM IN MFT 1
Units: 5  Repeatability: No
In the didactic portion of the course, issues relevant to the beginning clinician are addressed including refinement of interviewing skills and the application of treatments to specific problems. Students also receive group supervision and individual supervision based on either videotaping or live observation of their work.

MFTS 596P | PRACTICUM IN MFT 2
Units: 5  Repeatability: No
Issues relevant to the treatment process are covered including client-therapist match, resistance and change, assessment, treatment planning and the self of the therapist. Students also receive group supervision and individual supervision based on either videotaping or live observation of their work.

MFTS 597P | PRACTICUM IN MFT 3
Units: 5  Repeatability: No
Issues relevant to the involvement of schools, protective services and other groups and agencies during the treatment process are covered. Students also receive group supervision and individual supervision based on either videotaping or live observation of their work.

MFTS 598P | PRACTICUM EXTENSION
Units: 1-5  Repeatability: No
This course provides continuing group supervision for students who need to complete a substantial number of clinical hours after completing three semesters of Practicum.

MFTS 599 | INDEPENDENT STUDY
Units: 6
Independent study designed for individual student needs. Students must complete the Application for Independent Study or Research form and obtain the signatures of the faculty supervisor, Program Director/Department Chair and the Associate Dean prior to registering for the course.