

SCHOOL COUNSELLING FAQs

1) Is this an online program or a face-to-face master's program?

Our University of Alberta Master's Program in School Counselling is a face-to-face (in-person) program that draws on an adult learning model to enable working professionals (teachers) to come together to expand their knowledge and skills to prepare to take on school counsellor roles. The program is unique in that it is offered in a way that aligns with teachers' full-time work schedules, with classes taking place every alternate Saturday during the months when school is in session, and then in daily three week blocks in the summer when schools are closed. Students appreciate the opportunity to come together in person to learn, share their experiences, and form lasting professional networks.

2) How do you identify an appropriate school counselling practicum site and secure an appropriate supervisor for the practicum before applying to the program?

The first step in this process is to contact your school principal to determine whether they would be willing to support you in engaging in professional development to expand your skills to include counselling within the school. In this contact, you need to ask if your principal will guarantee that you can obtain experience as a counsellor-trainee working with students in the school for 1 day a week in the second year of your program, and would write you a letter to that effect. The second step in this process is to contact school counsellors currently working within your school or school district to ask if they would be willing to serve as a supervisor for your counselling work in the second year of the program and to write a letter stating their guarantee to do so to support your application to the program. The supervisor must possess at least a Master's Degree in School Counselling, Counselling Psychology, or School or Clinical Child Psychology.

If your principal is not willing or able to support you in this way and you are not able to secure a supervisor within your school of employment, then your next step would be to inquire with the school board or district you are working with about whether they could guarantee you a practicum placement in the second year of your program in another nearby school and to inquire about available practicum supervisors. You would subsequently need to request letters of support to accompany your master's program application once the placement and supervisor have been arranged.

Please be aware that some school districts do not allow teachers to do their school counselling practicum at the same school where they are presently employed. These schools require that the practicum placement is in a different school. The school district practicum coordinator or practicum lead may be able to help you in identifying a placement school if you are in a school district that has these restrictions in place.

3) What are the requirements of the practicum on the School Counselling trainees and what are the expectations of practicum supervisors? I need to know this information in order to ask my school board and possible practicum supervisors about whether they will supervise me.

Expectations of the School Counsellor Trainee

The practicum student is expected to be involved in counselling activities with students for one full school day per week during the duration of the practicum. At least 3 hours of the designated practicum school day each week needs to focus on the counsellor trainee providing individual counselling to students in the school. It would also be beneficial if the trainee could be involved in group counselling and vocational counselling and consultation. The group and vocational counselling components are required components for school counsellor placements in junior high and high school settings. Other school counsellor activities that the counsellor trainee can engage in during their one practicum day per week include but are not limited to: conducting student, teacher, and school needs assessments, collaborating with teachers and

parents in developing school-related programming, offering workshops, etc., depending on school needs and whether time permits.

Besides writing case notes for student files, the counsellor trainee is required to keep a detailed log and diary of all of the specific counselling-related activities engaged in each week of the entire practicum year. This log should include the number of students seen for individual counselling, the key presenting problems/issues addressed (e.g., depression, identity issues, family problems, etc.), career or other types of assessment, group counselling, and specific other school-based activities undertaken. Counsellor trainees are required to bring this log to individual supervision sessions with their practicum supervisor, as well as to group supervision sessions that occur as part of their practicum course at the university.

Expectations of Practicum Supervisors

Supervisors are expected to guide the counsellor trainee in conducting counselling sessions and related school-based activities, with a requirement of providing at least one hour of face-to-face individual supervision per week focusing on both the counsellor trainee's cases and work, as well as personal development process as a counsellor.

Supervisors will be asked to submit an interim progress report on the trainee's performance in counselling and related school-based activities in December, followed by a final evaluation in April.

4) Can I do a few hours each day of practicum that add up to a full day, rather than one full practicum day each week?

The answer is No. The practicum in this program is intended to fully immerse you into all aspects of a school counsellor role while you are under direct supervision by a person who is already a qualified school counsellor. Therefore, piecemeal practicum arrangements are not acceptable and will not be approved. The only variation of the one full day of practicum per week in year 2 of the program that is acceptable is two half-days each week - which would be the equivalent of one full practicum day per week.

5) If I have to spend one school day a week doing counselling during the 2nd year of the program for the practicum, will this reduce my teaching salary? If it does, are there any ways in which I can recover the lost income from that one day per week I will be spending in my practicum?

Different school boards/districts deal with this issue differently. You need to inquire with your principal and school board about how your salary may be affected by your pursuit of a Master's Degree in School Counselling and your one-day a week practicum commitments during the second year of your program. For example, teachers working with the Edmonton Public School Board (EPSB) typically are no longer considered one hundred percent full-time during their practicum year, and will have status changed to .8 FTE with their salary being reduced accordingly.

If you are a teacher working with EPSB or another school board that reduces the salary of students during their practicum year, you need to further inquire with your specific school board/district or the practicum coordinator for your school board/district (if there is one) about any educational or professional development funding programs that may be able to support your practicum training and your pursuit of a Master's Degree in School Counselling. Some school boards have programs in place that can financially support you in paying your tuition costs and compensate you for lost salary during the practicum year. For example, the Edmonton Public School Board has a program called the "EPSB Professional Improvement Program" that may be able to help cover these costs and income through teachers' employers. The practicum coordinator with EPSB offers workshops on how to apply for this funding during the months of November and December, and applications have to be made in January for funding for the following September. So, for example, school counselling students from EPSB should be applying for this fund

during the first year of their programs to be considered for financial assistance during their practicums in the second year.

6) Is admission to the program based competitively or on pre-requisites?

Admission to the School Counselling Master's Program is based on both factors. You need to have a minimum grade point average of 3.0 out of 4.0 or 6.5 out of 9.0 to be considered for admission to this program, along with experience teaching in a school setting, strong reference letters, and a guaranteed practicum placement and supervisor with your school/school board. You do not require psychology or counselling course work as background for this program. The strongest applicants who meet the above criteria among all of those who apply in a given year are accepted into the program.

7) How many students are typically enrolled in each School Counselling Master's Program Cohort?

Typically, 15-20 students are admitted to the program every two years, and these students proceed through the 2 year program together as a cohort.

8) Is this program available to international students?

This program is specifically designed to support the professional development of teachers working in Edmonton and area schools (or schools in other regions that are within commuting distance to Edmonton) to take on school counsellor roles. The program is for teachers who are already employed full-time within these school systems and who have their principal's or school board's support in obtaining practicum experience as a counsellor trainee within their school or school district. Therefore, this program is not designed for delivery to international students.

9) Which School Boards or regions have students in this program come from?

We have had students from the following districts enrolled in our University of Alberta School Counselling Master's Program over the years: Edmonton Public, Edmonton Catholic School Division, Elk Island School Division, Parkland School Division, Black Gold School Division, Calgary Board of Education, Calgary Catholic School Division, and many others. Students have commuted to the program from areas such as Leduc, Wetaskiwin, Calgary, and Chestermere.

10) If I am a teacher in a private setting, such as a residential group home, rather than in a public school system such as Edmonton Public, Edmonton Catholic, or Elk Island School District, does that exclude me from the program?

Yes. This program is specifically offered through liaisons with the public school system in providing practicum and professional development opportunities for teachers currently employed within it.

11) My main goal is to become a Registered Counselling Psychologist. Can I become Registered as a Counselling Psychologist with a Master's Degree in School Counselling? I don't understand what the difference is between a school counsellor and a psychologist.

Registered Counselling Psychologists are mental health service providers who receive generalist training that prepares them to work with a number of client groups (children, adolescents, adults, the elderly), across counselling modalities (individual work, marriage/family counselling, group work), with a wide range of presenting problems, across a variety of settings (e.g., hospitals, mental health clinics, university counseling centres, private practices, family counselling centres, sexual assault centres, etc.). Their training and role includes assessment using Level C tests that are limited to psychologists to administer, such as intelligence tests, personality tests, neuropsychological tests, and generalist counselling intervention. Therefore,

applicants for the Counselling Psychology Master's program are screened based on the substantial background knowledge and course credits in various areas of psychology that the College of Alberta Psychologists expects people applying to become Registered Psychologists to demonstrate, as well as based on various types of relevant counselling-related experiences across different contexts.

The School Counselling Master's Program is specifically designed to prepare trainees to undertake school counselling roles in elementary, junior high, or high school settings. These roles may involve administering Level A or B tests only, such as some academic achievement tests, providing individual and career counselling and consultation, engaging in crisis management and support, developing school programs, and acting as a liaison between teachers, parents, and students. The program provides excellent training for people wanting to continue their work in the school system. Students entering the School Counselling Program are not selected based on previous psychology course work background and the courses in this program do not provide the type of assessment and intervention training that people applying to become Registered Psychologists need to obtain for their generalist role.

Students interested in pursuing Registration as a Counselling Psychologist should consider their eligibility to apply for the Master's Program in Counselling Psychology – either the course-based or thesis-based route. Information about these programs is included on our Department of Educational Psychology Website. It should be acknowledged that students without background course work in psychology would have to take several undergraduate psychology courses before being eligible for consideration to either of these programs.

12) If I already had a Criminal Records Check and Intervention Records Check done to get my teaching job, do I still have to do a new one and go through this process again for the School Counselling Master's Program?

Yes. A person's behaviour and actions can change over time and therefore a current Criminal Records Check and Intervention Records Check are needed.