

USU's Marriage and Family Therapy Program Expands Community Access to Clinical Services

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An MFT graduate student works with clients in the Sorenson Center for Clinical Excellence.

The Sorenson Center for Clinical Excellence is currently accepting new clients for [marriage and family therapy](#) and other [psychology services](#). Services are available to all community members, including USU students, and fees are assessed on a sliding scale based on income.

With the appointment of new director Ryan Seedall, associate professor in the Human Development and Family Studies department, USU's Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) graduate program is continuing to prepare future clinicians to meet the nationwide demand for mental health services while providing therapy services to Cache Valley communities.

USU's Marriage and Family Therapy graduate program is designed to train students to work with individuals, couples, and families through challenges such as mental health, relationship issues, and parenting. Students in the program study therapy techniques, delve into current research, and, most importantly, gain experience delivering therapy to actual clients who need professional help. The program is accredited through the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education and meets all the requirements for licensure in the state of Utah.

Seedall has been part of the MFT program for nearly 12 years and has watched the program evolve in many ways. When Seedall first started at USU after working in

community mental health in Wyoming for several years, the MFT program was housed in the Family Life Center at the bottom of Old Main Hill and had room for up to 12 students.

Upon the completion of the Sorenson Center for Clinical Excellence (SCCE) in 2018, the MFT program moved to the new facility as part of the center's vision to provide community-facing mental health and wellness services across multiple disciplines. The MFT program's updated lodgings have been an important point of growth for the program; the SCCE has more space for graduate students to meet with clients, and its therapy rooms are outfitted with audio/visual equipment that makes it easy for students to review their therapy sessions.

Marriage and family therapy graduate students provide [low-cost treatment](#) to the Cache Valley community, including USU students, for issues like anxiety and depression, mood disorders, trauma, grief and loss, conflict communication, addiction, premarital challenges, sexual wellness, and many other difficulties that impact individuals, couples, and families. All student clinicians are supervised in their client work by experienced MFT faculty, many of whom—including Seedall—are still practicing therapists in addition to their teaching roles. These faculty have studied and specialized in a wide variety of mental health and family therapy subjects, so students are supported in helping their clients through whatever difficulties they are facing.



Dr. Ryan Seedall, MFT program director

Even if someone is struggling in a way that seems unrelated to their relationships, Seedall believes that relationships can be key in overcoming life's challenges. "Ultimately, the way I always view marriage and family therapy is whether or not the problem is the relationship itself, relationships have a tremendous amount of power in bringing about change," said Seedall. "We can address intrapersonal problems, but we can also use their relationships to help them accomplish their goals."

According to Seedall, research has shown that a therapist's experience level does not necessarily dictate outcomes for patients, meaning that services provided by students in the MFT program are just as effective as services delivered by professional therapists. In preparing students to be effective clinicians, the program is also helping expand access to high-quality therapy services for the Cache Valley community.

"Whether it be at the advanced practicum site or here in the Sorenson Center, our goal is to serve Cache Valley families," said Seedall. "Our students do some amazing things to help Cache Valley families accomplish their goals and improve in whatever areas are important to them."

Though the program has changed over the years, Seedall looks forward to continuing the program's legacy as director while examining how the program can advance in preparing high-quality therapists to enter the field. "The Marriage and Family Therapy model is a great model; it is very intensive, and very hands-on," said Seedall. "There's a mental health crisis, not just in Utah but in a lot of places, so we're trying to do our part to help facilitate the great clinicians addressing that."

Seedall attributes a large part of the MFT program's success to its high-caliber students. The program has remained small over the years, with four faculty and a maximum of 16 students at a time between two cohorts. This small size allows for more intimate instruction and training, but it also limits acceptance to the program to a small percentage of highly qualified applicants.

"We've got these incredible therapists who are really talented," said Seedall. "It's really fun for me to help them, but also just to sit back and recognize that these people have some natural skills that I'm not teaching them. They just have those natural skills, and then we get to add on to it."

MFT graduates are required to have 500 hours working with clients before they complete the program. About half of those hours are filled during advanced practicum experiences at clinic and centers throughout Cache Valley,

and the rest are filled with clients in the Sorenson Center. In both scenarios, students gain experience working with a wide variety of clients in different settings, helping prepare them for future PhD programs or to enter the professional field upon graduation.

"500 face-to-face therapy hours for graduates is pretty impressive, and our students really have a therapeutic maturity to them when they graduate," said Seedall. "My plan is just to continue enjoying having these wonderful students and help them give good services, get trained, and move forward."