

## Students With Competence Problems

Reference	Guidelines for faculty
	<p>Supervisees with professional competence problems</p> <p>A small proportion of graduate students in professional psychology programs demonstrate significant problems in competence. When this occurs, graduate advisors must be prepared to protect the integrity of the degree while simultaneously supporting the student. Balancing these two demands is an important advisor competence. Precedence must inevitably be given towards protecting the integrity of the degree; however, students cannot be dismissed arbitrarily from a graduate training program in which they have vested considerable time and money. Thus, decisions and actions taken by the graduate advisor in response to identified problems with student competence must never be arbitrary and must always be reasonably related to the competence problems that students demonstrate.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Graduate advisors should ensure that a written program handbook is provided to students at the onset of their program and that the program handbook describes the expectations of the student, the criteria and process of evaluation, the procedures that will be followed if the student does not meet the criteria, and procedures available to the student to clarify or contest the evaluation.</li><li>2. Supervisors should maintain accurate, timely, and complete documentation of supervisee performance relative to the criteria specified in the written program handbook.</li><li>3. Decisions that a student demonstrates problems with competence must of necessity be linked to the description of expected competence specified in the original program handbook. This requires that the graduate advisor decide whether the competence problems are more severe than the typical developmental variance in students' acquisition of skills, attitudes, and behaviors. Then, graduate advisors must be prepared to make and support decisions that a student has problems with professional competence using written documentation.</li><li>4. However, in most situations, students are legally entitled to a fair opportunity to remediate the competence problems and continue in their program of study. Fairness requires that the plan for remediation be substantive (with remedial actions that are corrective rather than punitive and are relevant to the competencies specified in the program expectations); fundamentally fair (consistent with accepted practice, accessible to the student, and compatible with the student's individual differences); and thoroughly explain the procedures that will be followed to determine whether the student is successful.</li></ol> <p>A special case exists if students disclose that they have a disability as defined by the Americans With Disabilities Act. In this case, the student may work with the UNL Office of Services for Students with Disabilities. Reasonable accommodations may be required as long as these do not compromise the integrity of the program, and are identified in interaction with and agreed to by</p>

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	<p>the student.</p> <p>5. Advisors should write a remediation plan that describes what is expected of the students and what steps will be taken by the graduate advisor and should be taken by the student to address the deficiency. It should be clear that these steps are directly related to the deficiencies and could be reasonable expected to remediate them. The plan should describe how progress will be evaluated, and how graduate advisors will follow-up with updated progress evaluations. Finally, the plan should explain the consequences for students should they fail to meet requirements of the remediation plan. A template for a remediation plan is available on the APA website at <a href="http://www.apa.org/ed/graduate/competency-remediation-template.doc">http://www.apa.org/ed/graduate/competency-remediation-template.doc</a>.</p> <p>Graduate advisors should monitor students' progress through a remediation plan, and implement the appropriate consequences should the student should they succeed or fail in meeting the requirements of the plan.</p>
<p>Forrest, L., Elman, N., Gizara, S., &amp; Vacha-Haase, T. (1999). Trainee impairment: A review of identification, remediation, dismissal, and legal issues. <i>The Counseling Psychologist, 27</i>, 627–686.</p>	<p>Forrest, Elman, Gizara, and Vacha-Haase (1999) reviewed 10 studies that investigated procedures for evaluating student competence in professional psychology training programs. The article discusses program polices, procedures and practices for identifying, remediating, and dismissing students who are judged to have competence problems. While this article focuses on professional psychology training programs, the discussed issues may represent common themes for probation and dismissal from graduate programs.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Graduate programs should conduct annual evaluations of student performance in the program. “Programs that do not complete annual evaluations on all students are vulnerable on several fronts: They are not in compliance with accreditation criteria or ethical standards; documentation will not exist in situations where future, more severe actions need to be taken; and legal challenges may result from students who claim they did not receive due process” (p. 639). Reported considerations during annual evaluations included: academic skills, assessment skills, clinical judgment, clinical skills, ethics, interpersonal skills, intrapersonal skills, response to supervision, and theoretical skills.</li> <li>2. Behaviors identified as severely impacting a student’s professional competence varied widely across programs. Reported student impairments that obstructed their progress in their programs included: academic deficiencies, clinical deficiencies, depression, emotional problems, ethical violations, fatigue or burnout, interpersonal problems, marital problems, maturity problems, personality disorder, physical illness, problems in supervision, social problems, and unprofessional behavior.</li> <li>3. Reported remediation strategies included being counseled out of the program, extra coursework,</li> </ol>

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	<p>increased supervision, a leave of absence, leaving the program, personal therapy, repeat practicum, growth group, and tutoring.</p> <p>4. “When a student has been evaluated, identified as inadequately meeting professional standards, participated in remediation, and yet is not demonstrating improvement, the next logical step is the initiation of the dismissal process on academic grounds” (p. 651). Reported reasons for dismissal included: poor academic performance, poor clinical performance, failed competency exams, ethical violations, psychopathy, poor interpersonal skills, and lack of timely progress.</p>