

RSA SCHOLAR STUDENT HANDBOOK



University of South Florida
College of Behavioral and Community Sciences
Department of Child and Family Studies

Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling Program



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INTRODUCTION

Congratulations! You are about to embark on a rewarding journey as a RSA Scholar. The purpose of the RSA Scholar program is to promote the recruitment, training and development of highly-qualified rehabilitation counselors to meet the high demand for providers of vocational rehabilitation (VR) services for individuals with disabilities. The focus of the project is to integrate customized employment practices into the core curriculum in alignment with new legislation that requires public VR systems to add customized employment options to their menu of services. Scholars agree to work (for full pay and an excellent benefit package) in the public or private VR system after graduation for a designated period of time (typically 2-4 years) in exchange for tuition and other qualifying expenses.

Rehabilitation counselors are the only professional counselors educated and trained at the graduate level specifically to serve individuals with disabilities. This includes an extensive knowledge of all aspects of disability as well as an in-depth understanding of critical considerations such as assistive technology and employment law. Unlike other counseling professionals, rehabilitation counselors are uniquely qualified to help individuals with disabilities acclimate into the workplace, and to help employers make a workplace more receptive to individuals with disabilities (CRCC, 2015).

Better Pay. Better Benefits.

In 2014, the American Counseling Association (ACA) completed the first ever Counselor Compensation Study. Rehabilitation counselors came out on top (ACA, 2014).

- Better Pay – Rehabilitation counselors are the most highly paid counseling specialty on average and earn over \$13,000 more than Clinical Mental Health Counselors, Mental Health Counselors, or Community Counselors.
- Better Benefits – Rehabilitation counselors receive better benefits than other professional counselors. These include employee retirement plans, medical coverage, dental, vision, and short-term and long-term disability.

This handbook will assist RSA scholars on their educational journey. It provides information on all aspects of the scholarship including payback requirements. Frequently asked questions are included as a supplement to the personal advising that each scholar will receive from an assigned RSA program faculty member. Enjoy your journey!

IMPORTANT NOTE: This handbook provides information specific to the RSA scholarship grant program. Full RMHC program information and requirements are included in the RMHC Student Handbook that can be found on the program website.

Link to RMHC Student Handbook: <http://rmhc.cbcs.usf.edu/assets/docs/StudentHandbook.pdf>

BACKGROUND

University of South Florida

The University of South Florida is a high-impact, global research university located in Tampa, Florida. It is one of the largest public universities in the nation, and among the top 50 universities, public or private, for federal research expenditures. The university is one of only four Florida public universities classified by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in the top tier of research universities, a distinction attained by only 2.3 percent of all universities. At the heart of USF is a vibrant, diverse and engaged student body. Serving nearly 48,000 students, the USF System has an annual budget of \$1.5 billion and an annual economic impact of \$4.4 billion.

College of Behavioral and Community Science

Established in 2008, the College of Behavioral & Community Sciences combines knowledge gained through the behavioral sciences with knowledge from the community. The emphasis on behavioral science reflects a focus on individuals, with behavioral research that examines problems and challenges people encounter, as well as their need for clinical and supportive services. The emphasis on community science reflects commitment to understanding the larger contextual factors that have an impact on the well-being and safety of individuals and their families, such as the effectiveness of systems and policies that impact and support the well-being of individuals. This is accomplished by engaging community and

neighborhood stakeholders in a partnered, participatory manner and by collaborating with local, state, and national organizations in both the public and private sectors.

The College of Behavioral & Community Sciences serves more than 3,000 students with eight undergraduate, eight masters, and six doctoral programs housed in six academic departments/schools. The College is the home of the Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, one of the largest behavioral health research and training institutes in the country as well as 17 specialized Research Centers and Institutes. CBCS's aim is to be among the most influential resources for behavioral and community sciences in the region, nation, and world.

Department of Child and Family Studies

The Department of Child & Family Studies (CFS) is one of seven departments and schools within the College of Behavioral & Community Sciences (BCS) at the University of South Florida (USF), and historically affiliated with the Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute (FMHI). All activities within CFS are closely aligned with USF strategic goals to expand research and scholarly endeavors, expand initiatives to strengthen and sustain healthy communities and to improve the quality of life for children and families. Academic programs are aligned with the University's goal of creating and supporting programs that address the changing needs of the region, state and nation through innovative approaches to curriculum development and delivery. CFS is consistently among the top three University departments bringing in external funding, thus meeting the University goal of establishing a strong and sustainable economic base in support of USF's growth.

Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling Program

The Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling (RMHC) program promotes quality services for individuals with differences in abilities and helps the state meet its human service needs in the areas of rehabilitation and mental health through teaching, research and service. The Master's Program offers both a non-thesis and a thesis program. Three graduate certificates are also offered. Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling is an interdisciplinary field and, as such, draws from many related areas. For example, included in this

interdisciplinary program is information drawn from psychology, education, behavioral sciences, biological sciences, philosophy, engineering, and law.

U.S. News & World Report's "America's Best Graduate Schools" rankings released in March 2015 listed RMHC at 24th in the nation, out of the 166 Rehabilitation Counseling Graduate Programs in the United States.

RMHC program faculty has expertise and credentialing in many areas of rehabilitation counseling including vocational evaluation, customized employment strategies, career counseling, assessment, and assistive technology. The program has been training highly qualified rehabilitation counselors for decades, hundreds of which have become employed by VR, and is well positioned to address the shortage of rehabilitation professionals through provision of its proven rehabilitation master's degree program.

Mission and Objectives

The mission of Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling is to promote quality behavioral health care for all, particularly people with disabilities, and to help the state and nation meet their human service and workforce needs in the area of rehabilitation and mental health counseling through teaching, research and service.

The objectives of the program are to:

1. Recruit and graduate a highly qualified and diverse student body from local, state, national and international regions.
2. Provide high quality teaching and inspire learning in rehabilitation and mental health counseling and related disciplines.
3. Contribute to and broaden research in the field of rehabilitation and mental health counseling and related disciplines through local, national and global collaboration.
4. Prepare rehabilitation and mental health counselors to be critical consumers of information and to encourage participation in and contribution to the expansion of knowledge in the field of rehabilitation and mental health counseling.
5. Enhance and maintain community engagement and service for the professional development of students by expanding experiential (field) training experiences.

6. Maintain and improve the ranking in U.S. News & World Report's America's Best Graduate Schools.
7. Maintain CORE and CACREP Accreditation at the highest levels of eligibility.
8. Increase the number of students who earn credentials as licensed and certified professionals.

Rehabilitation Counselor Scope of Practice

The Scope of Practice Statement identifies the knowledge and skills required for effective rehabilitation counseling services.

Assumptions:

- The Scope of Practice Statement identifies knowledge and skills required for the provision of effective rehabilitation counseling services to persons with physical, mental, developmental, cognitive, and emotional disabilities as embodied in the standards of the profession's credentialing organizations.
- Several rehabilitation disciplines and related processes (e.g., vocational evaluation, job development and job placement, work adjustment, case management) are tied to the central field of rehabilitation counseling. The field of rehabilitation counseling is a specialty within the rehabilitation profession with counseling at its core, and is differentiated from other related counseling fields.
- The professional scope of rehabilitation counseling practice is also differentiated from an individual scope of practice, which may overlap, but is more specialized than the professional scope. An individual scope of practice is based on one's own knowledge of the abilities and skills that have been gained through a program of education and professional experience. A person is ethically bound to limit his/her practice to that individual scope of practice.

Underlying Values:

- Facilitation of independence, integration, and inclusion of people with disabilities in employment and the community.
- Belief in the dignity and worth of all people.
- Commitment to a sense of equal justice based on a model of accommodation to provide and equalize the opportunities to participate in all rights and privileges available to all

people; and a commitment to supporting persons with disabilities in advocacy activities to achieve this status and empower themselves.

- Emphasis on the holistic nature of human function which is procedurally facilitated by the utilization of such techniques as:
 - interdisciplinary teamwork;
 - counseling to assist in maintaining a holistic perspective;
 - a commitment to considering individuals within the context of their family systems and communities.
- Recognition of the importance of focusing on the assets of the person.
- Commitment to models of service delivery that emphasize integrated, comprehensive services which are mutually planned by the consumer and the rehabilitation counselor.

Scope of Practice Statement:

Rehabilitation counseling is a systematic process which assists persons with physical, mental, developmental, cognitive, and emotional disabilities to achieve their personal, career, and independent living goals in the most integrated setting possible through the application of the counseling process. The counseling process involves communication, goal setting, and beneficial growth or change through self-advocacy, psychological, vocational, social, and behavioral interventions. The specific techniques and modalities utilized within this rehabilitation counseling process may include, but are not limited to:

- assessment and appraisal;
- diagnosis and treatment planning;
- career (vocational) counseling;
- individual and group counseling treatment interventions focused on facilitating adjustments to the medical and psychosocial impact of disability;
- case management, referral, and service coordination;
- program evaluation and research;
- interventions to remove environmental, employment, and attitudinal barriers;
- consultation services among multiple parties and regulatory systems;

- job analysis, job development, and placement services, including assistance with employment and job accommodations; and
- provision of consultation about and access to rehabilitation technology.

RMHC ACCREDITATION

The Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling Program at the University of South Florida is fully accredited by the Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE). The goal of accreditation is to ensure that education provided by programs and institutions of higher education meets acceptable levels of quality. According to CORE, the value and function of accreditation includes: 1) a measure of educational quality, 2) assurance that education programs are evaluated against nationally accepted standards and that program graduates are competent for entry into the workplace or for advanced practice, and 3) assurance to prospective employers that graduates come from a program where the content and quality satisfy established standards. CORE monitors each accredited program throughout the period of accreditation to verify that it continues to meet and exceed quality standards. Specifically, CORE accreditation promotes: 1) effective delivery of rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities; 2) development of graduates who have the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to provide rehabilitation counseling services to individuals with a wide range of disabilities; and 3) development of qualified personnel that meet the personnel needs of both public and private rehabilitation agencies. CORE accredited programs initiate program self-improvement by collecting outcome-oriented data from graduates, current students, and employers in both the public and private sectors (CORE, 2012).

Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling Program Accreditation

In July 2016, the Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling program at USF received dual accreditation under CORE and CACREP (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs). This dual accreditation designates the RMHC program as a Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling (CIRC) program. The primary reason for seeking dual accreditation is, currently, graduation from a CACREP accredited program is one of the requirements for independent practice within TRICARE and employment as a mental health

counseling practitioner within a growing number of Federal agencies, such as the Veterans Administration and U.S. Army Substance Abuse Program. Dual accreditation allows additional employment opportunities for our students. Students who graduate within 18 months of the notification of dual accreditation are grandfathered in as graduates of a Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling program. Accreditation standards can be found on the web at either www.cacrep.org or www.core-rehab.org.

CORE/CACREP Merger

On July 20, 2015, the counseling profession's two major accrediting organizations – the Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) – signed a Plan of Merger Agreement. The Plan, approved by both the CORE Board and CACREP Board at their respective summer meetings, represents several years of discussions on strengthening the counseling profession through the establishment of a single unified accreditation process for counselor preparation programs. CORE and CACREP had entered into an historic affiliation agreement in 2013 to accomplish this on behalf of all future counselors and their clients. The two organizations believe their vision for a unified counseling profession is better realized through a merger of both organizations. CORE and CACREP will immediately begin taking steps toward implementing the terms of the merger agreement, which will be concluded effective June 30, 2017. Beginning July 1, 2017, CACREP will carry on the mission of both organizations. In the interim, CORE will continue to conduct the business of accreditation on behalf of its programs and will complete its current standards revision process for rehabilitation counseling programs. CACREP and CORE will jointly appoint a committee to examine the reformatting of CORE Standards to fit into the CACREP review structure, as well as to recommend how disability concepts can be more fully and clearly infused into the CACREP Standards to strengthen the future preparation of all counselors.

(Excerpt from CACREP policy document: <http://www.cacrep.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Conversion-Policy-of-RC-to-CIRC-and-CMHC.pdf>).

RSA SCHOLARSHIP INFORMATION

Overview

The RMHC program has been awarded a five-year, renewable federal long-term training grant to increase the number of highly qualified rehabilitation counselors available to work within the vocational rehabilitation system. This grant provides scholarship opportunities for students beginning in 2016. Scholars will agree to work (for full pay and benefit) in the public, non-profit, or private vocational rehabilitation system after graduation for a designated period of time (typically 2-4 years) in exchange for tuition and other qualifying expenses. Scholarships are made available through a federal grant from Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), United States Department of Education. In keeping with the priorities established by the Rehabilitation Services Administration, the USF Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling (RMHC) graduate program is designed to provide the student competencies in the rehabilitation of adults with complex physical, mental or emotional disabilities and to provide a special relevance to state vocational rehabilitation services and closely related cooperating private agencies and programs.

Purpose

The major purpose of the RSA academic scholarship award is to increase the supply of rehabilitation personnel available for employment as rehabilitation counselors in public and private sector and in nonprofit agencies involved in the vocational rehabilitation of individuals with disabilities. The focus of the project is to integrate customized employment (CE) practices into the core curriculum in alignment with new legislation (WIOA) that requires public VR systems to add customized employment options to their menu of services.

Primary Aims

Aim 1: Recruit a minimum of 30 scholars over the five-year period, with outreach to underserved groups, to increase the number of competent rehabilitation professionals available to work in the VR system.

Aim 2: Provide high quality training based on the recommendations of researchers and effective practices in the field to promote competitive, integrated employment outcomes for VR consumers.

Aim 3: Provide targeted training on CE strategies designed to identify the interests and talents of job seekers and to negotiate career placements in competitive, integrated settings.

Aim 4: Enhance collaborative relationships with VR, community-based providers, employers, and other stakeholders to promote a more efficient, effective, and seamless system.

Rehabilitation Services Administration

The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) is the funder for the RSA Scholar program. RSA oversees grant programs that help individuals with physical or mental disabilities to obtain employment and live more independently through the provision of such supports as counseling, medical and psychological services, job training and other individualized services. to provide leadership and resources to assist state and other agencies in providing vocational rehabilitation (VR) and other services to individuals with disabilities to maximize their employment, independence and integration into the community and the competitive labor market.

RSA is charged with:

- administering formula and discretionary grant programs authorized by Congress;
- evaluating, monitoring, and reporting on the implementation of Federal policy and programs and the effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation, supported employment, and other related programs for individuals with disabilities;
- coordinating with other Federal agencies, State agencies, and the private sector including professional organizations, service providers, and organizations of persons with disabilities for the review of program planning, implementation, and monitoring issues.

Admission Criteria

Admission to RMHC Program

Applicants to the RSA Scholar program must first be admitted to the Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling graduate program. RMHC applicants must complete the following steps:

1. Submit an online graduate application indicating Rehabilitation Counseling as the selected major.

Link to RMHC application: <http://rmhc.cbcs.usf.edu/mastersProgram/apply.cfm>

2. Submit all required documents to the Office of Graduate Admissions which will include 3 Letters of Recommendation, current resume, official GRE scores, and statement of purpose. Specific details regarding document requirements are listed on the application.
3. Pay the \$30 application fee as required by the application.

Please note: Applicants are expected to have earned a grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or higher on all course work beyond 60 credit hours at the bachelor's degree level from a regionally accredited institution or the equivalent from a foreign institution. Enrollment is limited and applications are judged competitively. Meeting minimum admission standards does not guarantee acceptance into the program. Students typically enter the Program after earning a bachelor's degree in a social, behavioral or health sciences related disciplines, but no specific undergraduate major is required.

Admission to RSA Scholar Program

RSA Scholarships are available to graduate students accepted to or enrolled in the RMHC master's degree program. Awards are based upon an appropriate match of a person's career objectives in relation to the purpose of the scholarship program. Potential for graduate work as indicated by educational background, work experience, and financial need is also considered in selecting scholarship recipients.

Persons receiving a scholarship must:

- document United States residency or citizenship status;

- state an interest in a career in vocational rehabilitation of individuals with disabilities;
- agree to complete an internship in an approved Vocational Rehabilitation agency;
- agree to the employment obligation described in this summary;
- not be concurrently receiving any other federal, state or local public or voluntary agency educational allowance when that allowance is conditional on a conflicting employment obligation;
- not be in default on a debt to the federal government under a non-procurement transaction;
- not be declared by a judge (under the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988) ineligible to receive federal assistance;
- be a full-time graduate student in the RMHC program;
- maintain a grade point average of 3.0 or above;
- maintain satisfactory progress toward completing the degree requirements; and
- meet program matriculation and retention policies.

A scholarship recipient must be enrolled as a full-time (or equivalent) student. Exceptions for part-time status may be made with the approval of the RSA Program Director. Nine credits per semester is considered full-time(6 during summer terms). All awards are contingent upon receipt of an annual award of an RSA Long-Term Training Grant. Award levels for individual RSA Scholarships are dependent on the number of qualified applicants, the need demonstrated by these applicants, and the level of funding. Because of an extensive number of qualified applicants and limited financial support, partial scholarships may be awarded at times.

Application Submission Instructions:

1. Complete the RSA Scholar Application* that can be found on the RSA Scholar Website: <http://rmhc.cbcs.usf.edu/RAScholarProgram/RAScholarProgram.cfm>
2. Attach Current Resume
3. Attach Statement of Interest – Describe your career goal and interests and relate them to the purpose of the RSA scholarship (no more than 1 double-spaced page).

4. Submit application materials to the RSA Program Director c/o: Dr. Tammy Jorgensen Smith at tjsmith@bcs.usf.edu. Email submissions should contain "RSA Scholar Application" in the subject line. Faxed applications may be submitted to 813-974-8080.

* The RSA Scholar application is only for the RSA Scholar program. Acceptance to the Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling Program at the University of South Florida is required prior to admission to the RSA Scholar program.

If you are a person with a disability and need accommodations for completing the application process including alternative formats, please contact the RMHC Program at 813-974-2855 or you may contact the RSA Program Director directly at tjsmith@bcs.usf.edu.

Scholar Selection

All RSA Scholar applications that 1) are complete; and 2) are submitted by the published deadline will be reviewed by a committee of two or more reviewers. Reviewers may be recruited from the RMHC faculty and the RSA Scholar Program Advisory Committee. Applications are independently scored on multiple criteria using a 5-point scale. Criteria include student status in the RMHC program; grade point average (past two years); financial need; relevant experience (paid and unpaid); scholarly honors and activities; career interest and goals; quality of the statement of interest; and quality/completeness of the application. A minimum score of 20 is required to be considered for a scholarship. The number and amount of scholarship awards will be contingent upon the amount of funding available, number of qualified applicants, financial need of the applicants and, when appropriate, other factors based on the judgement of the reviewers.

NOTE: Recruitment strategies will target underserved populations. It is permissible to conduct outreach to increase eligible minority candidates, but not to admit or provide funding solely on the basis of race, ethnicity, or disability. Therefore, these criteria will not be used in scoring or prioritizing applications.

Notice of Nondiscrimination

The Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling Program demonstrates respect for and understanding of cultural and individual diversity and avoids any actions that would restrict program access or completion on grounds that are irrelevant to success in graduate training. Pursuant to Title IX, the University does not discriminate on the basis of sex in educational programs or activities that it operates. Such protection extends to both employees and students. Any questions or inquiries concerning to the application of Title IX may be referred to the Title IX Coordinator, Senior Deputy Title IX Coordinator, or to any of the University's Deputy Title IX Coordinators. The most up-to-date information on the University's Title IX Coordinator and resources can be found in the webpage for the Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Equal Opportunity, located at <http://www.usf.edu/diversity>. When appropriate, the University will take steps to prevent the recurrence of harassment, including sexual violence, and to correct any discriminatory effects of harassment on the complainant and others.

The Title IX Coordinator is:

Dr. Jose Hernandez, Chief Diversity Officer
4202 E. Fowler Avenue, ALN 172, Tampa, Florida 33620
(813) 974-0537; jehernan@usf.edu

Discrimination and harassment on the basis of race, color, marital status, sex, religion, national origin, disability, age, genetic information, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, or veteran status are also prohibited. (Please see USF System Policy Number 0-007, Diversity & Equal Opportunity: Discrimination & Harassment).

Scholars Progress and Academic Standing

RSA scholars are required to meet the same criteria for academic progress and standing as are indicated for all RMHC students. Specific information, policies, and procedures are included in the RMHC Student Handbook, the USF website, and in RMHC course syllabi. Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with this information and for maintaining the highest level of ethical and professional behavior in the classroom and in the field.

GPA Requirements and Probation

All graduate students are required to maintain a minimum 3.0 GPA and earn a “B” or better in each graduate course. A GPA of less than 3.0 will result in probationary status. The Graduate School requires a written plan to remove the student from probation. Students on probation must attain a minimum 3.0 GPA by the end of the following semester to avoid continuing probation. Additional information regarding probation is available at <http://www.grad.usf.edu/inc/linked-files/Probation%20Tutorial.pdf>. If a student remains on probation after two semesters, the department may recommend:

1. That the student withdraws from the program;
2. That the Graduate School dismiss the student from the program; or
3. The Graduate School may dismiss the student from the program.

Academic Performance

The following courses require a grade of “B” or better to be accepted toward a student’s program of study: RCS 5020 - Foundations of Mental Health Counseling and RCS 6803 – Practicums I & II. Failure to achieve a grade of “B” will require the student to repeat the course and earn a “C” or better. No grade forgiveness applies at the graduate level and all grades will appear on the student’s transcript. In such cases, a student may not substitute the course with one taken at another university or via an on-line program. Any student who has earned less than a “C” in a course and/or has been notified of continued poor academic performance (missed assignments, excessive absences and/or “I” grades) will be referred to their program academic advisor. Poor academic performance may result in a written notice followed by recommendation for withdrawal or dismissal.

Academic Policies & Regulations

More detail on the items below can be found at the following link:

<http://www.grad.usf.edu/catalog.php>

- Academic Policy Information
- Student Responsibilities

- Student Conduct – It is expected that all students will conduct themselves in a professional manner, which includes appropriate attire in the classroom and at the field placement site, punctuality, and the like.
- Academic Integrity of Students
- Disruption of Academic Process
- Student Academic Grievance Procedure
- Academic Standards and Grades

Advising and Professional Organizations

RSA Scholar Advising

As an interdisciplinary field, Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling attracts faculty members from a full range of disciplines and related programs as they enhance diversity of thought and add richness to the academic and research needs of the department. The RMHC program assigns each student to a faculty advisor who provides academic support and career counseling throughout the academic program. Scholars of the RSA Long-Term Training Grant will be assigned to faculty who are key personnel on the project. These scholars will be required to meet with their faculty advisor each semester for the assessment of progress in the program, provision of academic advisement and career planning, and to prepare for future semesters. Faculty advisors will promote networking and mentoring opportunities for scholars through student participation in conferences, workshops, and other appropriate venues. Career counseling will be provided by faculty advisors and is also available to students through USF's career center. This assistance will help to assure that scholars are successful in obtaining and retaining qualifying employment.

Professional Organizations

It is strongly recommended that students join one or more professional associations in the counseling field. Membership in the associations is of critical importance to the profession at large, and has many important individual benefits including professional journals, professional meetings, in-service training information, newsletters on current developments in

the profession, malpractice and other forms of insurance (Thomas, Inniss-Richter, Mata, & Cottrell, 2013). A list of professional organizations with web links is included in Appendix C.

Scholarships and Financial Procedures

A minimum of 75% of annual grant funds (\$166,665) will be utilized to provide scholarships and stipends to scholars. We plan to enroll a minimum of 6 scholars per year and provide scholarships in amounts up to \$27,777.50 to assist with RMHC program related costs. Allowable costs include tuition, textbooks, fees, student travel to professional development events, internship stipends, and CRC certification exam fees. Any other use of scholarship funds requires written approval from the scholar's advisor. Funding for tuition and all other approved expenses will be dispersed through the USF Financial Aid office.

Scholar Payback Agreement

All scholars are required to sign a scholar payback agreement prior to receipt of scholarship funding. A copy of the agreement is included in Appendix A. The payback period for each scholar is calculated based on the semesters attended and credit hours attained while a scholar rather than by the scholarship funding amount. Scholars who are approved to attend part time will have the payback period prorated based on credit hours attended rather than calendar months attended.

Additionally; RSA scholars agree to provide current contact information and alternate contacts for payback tracking requirements. Scholars must keep in touch with the RMHC program faculty after graduation to provide updates on the place and duration of employment. There is a two-year grace period after graduation to find qualifying employment. If a scholar does not work for an approved site, s/he will be required to repay the RSA funds received. This is also the case if a scholar does not complete the academic program. Once a scholar signs the payback agreement, s/he is legally bound to the RSA payback requirements. See the Frequently Asked Questions in Appendix D for more information on payback requirements.

RSA SCHOLAR PAYBACK REQUIREMENTS

Vocational Rehabilitation Internship Requirement:

The scholar will complete an internship in an approved Vocational Rehabilitation agency as a requirement for this scholarship. The following information outlines the terms and conditions of your employment obligation if you should receive an RSA scholarship.

Employment Obligation:

1. The scholar will obtain and maintain employment -- in a state, private, or nonprofit rehabilitation, including a professional corporation or professional practice group through which the individual has a service arrangement with the designated state rehabilitation agency -- on a full or part-time basis for a period of not less than the full-time equivalent of two years for each year for which a scholarship is received. The work requirements for portions of an academic year are prorated.
2. After completion of the training for which the scholarship is awarded, the employment obligation must be met within a period of not more than the sum of the number of years in the period described in item one and two additional years. If the degree is not completed, the student is considered to be in repayment status.
3. The employment obligation as applied to a part-time scholar is based on the accumulated academic years of training for which the scholarship is received.
4. Until the scholar has been notified that s/he has satisfied the employment obligation described in item one, or has entered repayment status, the scholar will inform the USF RMHC program of any change of name, address, or employment status and will document employment satisfying the terms of the agreement.
5. Subject to the provisions regarding deferral or repayment exception, when the scholar enters repayment status, the amount of the scholarship that has not been retired through eligible employment will constitute –
 - a. debt owed the United States that will be repaid by the scholar, including interest and costs of collection; and

- b. may be collected by the Secretary of Education by any means permitted in federal law for the collection of debts, in the case of the scholar's failure to meet the obligation.

Deferral/Repayment Exception:

Deferral or repayment exception to the above may be granted, in whole or part, by the Secretary of the Department of Education as follows:

1. Repayment is not required if the scholar –
 - a. is unable to continue the course of study or perform the work obligation because of an impairment that is expected to continue indefinitely or result in death; or
 - b. has died.
2. Repayment of a scholarship may be deferred during the time the scholar is –
 - a. engaging in a full-time course of study at an institution of higher education;
 - b. serving, not in excess of three years, on active duty as a member of the armed services of the United States;
 - c. serving as a volunteer under the Peace Corps Act;
 - d. serving as a full-time volunteer under Title I of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973;
 - e. temporarily totally disabled, for a period not to exceed three years; or
 - f. unable to secure employment as required by the agreement by reason of the care provided to a disabled spouse for a period not to exceed twelve months.
3. Written application must be made to the Secretary to request a deferral or exception to performance or repayment of a scholarship. Documentation must be provided to substantiate the grounds for deferral or exception.

Failure to Meet Obligation:

In the event of failure to meet the terms and conditions of a scholarship agreement or to obtain a deferral or exception, the scholar shall repay all or part of the scholarship.

1. Amount: The amount of scholarship to be repaid is proportional to the employment obligation not completed.
2. Interest Rate: The Secretary of Education charges the scholar interest on the unpaid balance owed in accordance with 31 U.S.C. 3717.
3. Interest Accrual:
 - a. Interest on the unpaid balance accrues from the date the scholar is determined to have entered repayment status.
 - b. Any accrued interest is capitalized at the time the scholar's repayment schedule is established.
 - c. No interest is charged for the period of time during which repayment has been deferred.
4. Collection Costs: The Secretary of Education may impose reasonable collection costs.
5. Repayment Status: A scholar enters repayment status on the first day of the first calendar month after the earliest of the following dates, as applicable:
 - a. The date the scholar informs the Secretary he or she does not plan to fulfill the employment obligation under the agreement.
 - b. Any date when the scholar's failure to begin or maintain employment makes it impossible for that individual to complete the employment obligation within the number of years required.
6. Amounts and Frequency of Payment: The scholar shall make payments to the Secretary that cover principal, interest, and collection costs according to a schedule established by the Secretary.

NOTE: Agreement is Subject to Change. Policies, regulations and procedures established by the Rehabilitation Services Administration, governing the scholarship, take precedence. The University of South Florida is not responsible to provide scholarships to students should this Federal funding be withdrawn.

RSA SCHOLAR CURRICULUM

Course Sequencing

The RMHC curriculum prepares scholars to become highly qualified counseling professionals. RSA scholars will follow the standard RMHC curriculum to meet the requirements for the master's degree in Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling. Three additional required courses (described below) will be incorporated into the curriculum for scholars. Changes to standard curriculum sequencing require approval from the faculty advisor.

Online Course Delivery – Several courses have been converted to an online format to increase availability for students, provide flexibility in schedules, and to enhance accessibility. Online courses are offered through the USF Canvas Learning System. The system is designed to present material in module format with multiple modalities for interaction and learning.

Additional Required Courses for RSA Scholars

The RMHC program has been able to enhance its current master's degree program through the addition of courses that align with provisions of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) that require public VR systems to incorporate customized employment strategies into their menu of services. Additionally, courses on quality case management and documentation and critical thinking skills and collaborative relationships will enhance scholars' abilities to become highly competent rehabilitation counselors and promote a more seamless system of service delivery for consumers. The courses emphasize applied learning that focuses on effective practices to serve VR consumers with a wide range of disabilities. Each of the courses provide 3 credit hours and they are offered in online format (with integrated applied/experiential assignments). These courses may be used to fulfill the elective requirements of the RMHC program.

Advanced Case Management and Quality Documentation

This course explores the principles of caseload management and procedures utilized with rehabilitation clients across the continuum of care in public state vocational rehabilitation agencies, rehabilitation facilities, and in private settings. Topics in this course include

interpretation of diagnostic information, arrangement of services, monitoring program outcomes, coordination of placement, job accommodation planning, ethical decision-making related to case management, consideration of multicultural issues, and overall management of caseloads. Practical application of skills in case documentation and management will be achieved through case examples, class exercises, and assignments.

Critical Thinking Skills and Collaborative Relationships

Critical thinking is the intentional application of rational, higher order thinking skills, such as analysis, synthesis, problem recognition and problem solving, inference, and evaluation. Students will be introduced to aspects of critical thinking including decision making and problem solving skills, understanding client perspectives, cause and effect relationships, and detecting flaws and biases in one's thinking skills. Collaboration is a process where two or more people or organizations work together to realize shared goals. Students will learn principles of networking and forming collaborative relationships to facilitate joint development of common goals, shared responsibility, and working in partnership to achieve goals. The course includes a series of assignments and exercises to build critical thinking skills with emphasis on the counseling relationship and collaborative interactions.

Customized Employment Strategies for Rehabilitation

Customized employment is a flexible process designed to personalize the employment relationship between a job seeker and an employer in a way that meets the needs of both. It is based on an individualized match between the interests, talents, and conditions for employment of the job candidate and the identified business needs of an employer. Students will learn about the three primary components of the customized employment process: Discovery, customized employment planning, and customized job development. Practical application of skills will be achieved through case examples and class exercises.

Program Electives

RSA scholars have opportunities to select electives that align with target populations in the field of vocational rehabilitation. Potential options are listed below. However, scholars may

request approval of other electives through their assigned advisor. Electives are optional and are not included in the required 63 credit hour program.

- MHS 6065 – Issues and Trends in Developmental Disabilities
- ASL 3514 - American Deaf Culture - Online Course
- RCS 6459 - Professional Skills for Addictions Counselors
- SOW 6931 - Veteran Reintegration
- RCS 6906 - Independent Study/Seminar – topics include traumatic brain injuries; autism spectrum disabilities; transition; and/or other approved course topics

CRC Exam Preparation Course (1 credit hour directed study)

This highly recommended directed study course prepares students for the CRC certification examination. The CRC Exam consists of 175 multiple-choice questions across ten knowledge domains in rehabilitation counseling. Each domain is further divided into subdomains. The prep course is also helpful in preparing for the RMHC comprehensive exam.

Field Experience/Internship

The RMHC program includes three field placement courses of one semester each. The first two are Practicum I and Practicum II (both RCS 6803 with different section numbers) and each requires 14 hours per week (minimum of 200 hours each) in a clinical setting. The third is the Internship (RCS 6825), which requires 40 hours per week (minimum of 600 hours total) in an approved agency. Students must register for all field placement courses through the RMHC program. The RMHC program must have an approved affiliation agreement with an agency before a student can commence with field work and the agency must be able to provide the student with: 1) a minimum of one hour of individual supervision each week, 2) counseling experiences, and 3) the opportunity to obtain audio tapes from consenting clients (not required for internships). Students must successfully complete Legal/Ethical Issues (RCS 5780) and Foundations of Mental Health Counseling (MHS 5020) and have earned a grade of “B” or better before registering for field placement courses. Students are expected to maintain the highest level of ethical standards in accordance with the Code of Ethics of the Commission on

Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (2010). Students are obligated to keep information of a personal nature confidential. Audio tapes obtained during practicum and internship must be erased after they are reviewed and critiqued. Each student must complete a field placement application and obtain student liability insurance.

RSA scholars are required to complete their internship within a vocational rehabilitation (VR) counseling setting. The priority of RSA is to build capacity within public VR systems. However, other options are allowed. For example, exceptions to this requirement may include: 1) lack of VR capacity to provide the required supervision to interns; 2) physical distance to the VR agency (rural students); or 3) scholar request to work in the non-profit or private sector of vocational rehabilitation. Tampa Bay is a metropolitan area with 15 VR office locations in the district (Area 4). However, the RMHC program has field placement agreements with multiple community-based VR employers should internships within the public system not be available.

Link to RMHC Field Placement Information:

<http://rmhc.cbcs.usf.edu/mastersProgram/fieldPlacement.cfm>

Final Comprehensive Examination

In addition to the required coursework and field experiences, all students must pass a comprehensive examination that covers all core courses. Students are eligible to sit for the examination during the semester in which they will complete all program requirements, with the exception of Internship. Completion of internship is not a requirement to sit for the examination, which is given in fall and spring semesters.

CERTIFIED REHABILITATION COUNSELOR (CRC) CREDENTIAL

All RMHC graduates are eligible to apply for national certification with the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC). Applicants must pass a national examination to become a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC). The designation of Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) is an indication of an advanced level of specialized education and training, an adherence to rigid standards of ethical practice, and an ongoing commitment to lifelong learning. Rehabilitation counselors who have earned the CRC designation possess a marketable and valued credential that distinguishes them from other counseling professionals.

CRC certification also establishes a recognizable point of differentiation with employers and clients that promotes consumer confidence and protection in the workplace.

- The CRC is the premier credential designed specifically for rehabilitation counselors. CRCC developed its credentialing process in an effort to enhance the quality of services delivered to individuals with disabilities.
- Rehabilitation Counselors who earn the designation of CRC must meet stringent eligibility requirements, including advanced education and work experience specific to serving individuals with disabilities. They must also pass the CRC Examination.
- Once certified, CRCs must adhere to a rigid Code of Professional Ethics for Rehabilitation Counselors.
- CRCs must also demonstrate an ongoing commitment to lifelong learning by renewing their certification every 5 years through continuing education or re-examination. Participation in continuing education ensures that all CRCs continue to expand their skills.
- CRCs stay current on leading edge changes within the field such as medical advancements, assistive technology applications, changes in employment law, and workplace and communication advancements.

Benefits of CRC Certification

- Earning your CRC certification means you possess a marketable and valued credential that distinguishes you from other counseling professionals.
- CRC certification also establishes a recognizable point of differentiation with employers and clients who value an advanced level of specialized education and training, an adherence to rigid standards of ethical practice, and an ongoing commitment to lifelong learning.
- The CRC credential can lead to job placements, job advancement, salary advancement, and referrals from medical and non-medical professionals.

Code of Ethics

The standards of this mandatory code are intended to assure the public that the rehabilitation counseling profession accepts its responsibility to provide caring service to individuals with disabilities. All CRCs/CCRCs are bound to act in accordance with the Code.

Code of Ethics for CRCs: <https://www.crccertification.com/filebin/pdf/CRCCodeOfEthics.pdf>

CRCC website: <https://www.crccertification.com/>

REFERENCES

American Counseling Association. (2014). *State of the Profession: Counselor Compensation*. Retrieved December 10, 2015 from <http://www.counseling.org/careers/aca-career-center/counselor-compensation>

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Council on Rehabilitation Education. (2012). Standards for rehabilitation counselor education programs. In *Accreditation manual for masters level rehabilitation counselor education programs* (pp. 21-43). Schaumburg, IL: Author [CORE]. Retrieved from http://www.core-rehab.org/Files/Doc/PDF/CORE%20ACCREDITATION%20%20MANUAL%20Revised%2005_21_2012.pdf

Thomas, M., Inniss-Richter, Z., Mata, H., & Cottrell, R. R. (2013). Career development through local chapter involvement: Perspectives from chapter members. *Health Promotion Practice, 14*(4), 480-484. doi:10.1177/1524839913479378

Federal Regulations for RSA Scholarship Programs:

CITATIONS IN LAW: Section 12 (c), Section 304 (b)(3)(A), Section 304 (b)(3)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended; 29 U.S.C. 711(c) and 744(b)

CITATIONS IN REGULATIONS: 34 CFR 386.42, 34 CFR 386.43, 34 CFR 386.44, 34 CFR 386.45, 34 CFR 386.46, 34 CFR 386.47

Appendix A: Scholar Agreement

This Scholarship Agreement is entered into on this _____ day of _____, 20__ in compliance with federal regulations at Title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 386 related to the Long-Term Training Program and funded by the Rehabilitation Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Education. The federal regulations noted above in this Agreement and the RSA Long-Term Training Scholarship Manual have been made available to me by the institution that awarded the scholarship funds. An official of the applicable institution, by signing the Agreement, acknowledges that the terms and conditions of the scholarship have been fully disclosed to the scholar by providing all applicable information.

I, _____, agree to abide by the stipulations noted below as conditions of receipt of the scholarship for training in the Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling (RMHC) master's degree program at the University of South Florida (USF) within the Department of Child and Family Studies.

My receipt of these scholarship funds is predicated upon the expectation that I will maintain or seek employment in a designated State rehabilitation agency or an approved public rehabilitation agency providing services to individuals with disabilities under an agreement with such approved agency. Under the terms of the Long-Term Training Program, scholarship funds are to be used to defray costs associated with completion of a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling. These costs may include tuition, textbooks, fees, student travel to professional development events, internship stipends, and CRC certification exam fees. Any other use of scholarship funds requires written approval from the program.

Therefore, as a designated Long-Term Training scholar, I agree to:

- 1) maintain employment - -
 - a. in a designated State rehabilitation agency or an approved public rehabilitation agency under an agreement with such approved agency;
 - b. on a full or part time basis;
 - c. for a period not less than the full-time equivalent of two years for each academic year for which scholarship assistance was received beginning immediately after the completion of the training program for which the scholarship was awarded, and;

- 2) repay all or part of any scholarship received, plus interest, if I do not fulfill the requirements of paragraph 1 of this agreement (immediately above), except as the Secretary of Education by regulations may provide for repayment exceptions and deferrals.

- 3) The employment obligation as applied to part-time scholar will be based on the accumulated academic years of training for which the scholarship is received.
- 4) Until I have satisfied the employment obligation described above, I will inform the institution which awarded the scholarship of any change of name, address, or employment status and I will document employment satisfying the terms of the agreement.
- 5) Subject to the provisions of 34 CFR 386.41 of the federal regulations, regarding a deferral or exception, if I enter repayment status under 34 CFR 386.43 (e), the amount of the scholarship that has not been repaid through eligible employment will constitute a debt owed to the United States that - -
 - a. Will be repaid by me, including interest and costs of collection as provided n 34 CFR. 43; and
 - b. May be collected by the Secretary of Education in accordance with 34 CFR Part 30, in the case of failure to meet the obligation of 34 CFR 386.43.

I have been informed that scholarships are dependent upon the availability of funding and a performance review to determine fourth and fifth year funding.

Signature of Scholar _____
Date

Printed Name of Scholar _____/_____/_____
Date of Birth _____-_____-_____
Social Security Number

Email Address _____
Alternate Email Address

Signature of Project Director _____
Date

Appendix B: Faculty Credentials and Contact Information

Tammy Jorgensen Smith, Ph.D., CRC (Project Director/Principal Investigator) is a tenured Associate Professor in the Department of Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling. Dr. Smith has a Ph.D. in Counselor Education with a Specialization in Leadership from Barry University (a CACREP accredited program) and a master's degree in Rehabilitation Services from Florida State University (CORE accredited). She has been a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) since 1999. Dr. Smith has focused her career on the research and implementation of innovative, best practice models that are designed to promote full inclusion for individuals with disabilities and on activities that promote self-determination and quality in all aspects of life. She joined USF in 2007 as a Research Assistant Professor with the Florida Center for Inclusive Communities (FCIC) – a University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities. Dr. Smith has extensive experience in grant management and has served as Principal Investigator on several state and federal research grants. She maintains active collaborative relationships with stakeholders at the local, state, and national level and frequently presents her work at conferences. Her primary focus has been on facilitating access to customized employment strategies for individuals with complex disabilities.

Tammy Jorgensen Smith, Ph.D., CRC

Direct Line: 813-974-7713

Email: tjsmith@bcs.usf.edu

Christina Dillahunt-Aspillaga, Ph.D., CRC, CVE, CLCP, PVE, CBIST (Co-Investigator) received her Ph.D. in Rehabilitation Science from USF. She is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC), a Certified Vocational Evaluator (CVE), a Certified Life Care Planner (CLCP), a Professional Vocational Evaluator (PVE), and a Certified Brain Injury Specialist Trainer (CBIST). Dr. Dillahunt-Aspillaga is employed as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling. She is currently working as Research Associate at the Center of Innovation on Disability & Rehabilitation Research (CINDRR) within James A. Haley Veterans Hospital. She is the former State Director of Family Programs and Services for the Brain Injury Association of

Florida, Inc. Her research areas include employment for persons with disabilities with an emphasis on traumatic brain injury (TBI). Other interests include family and community support, caregiving, and community re-integration for individuals with TBI. She has presented at regional, national, and international conferences, and has published articles in various peer-reviewed journals.

Tina Dillahunt-Aspillaga, PhD, CRC, CVE, CLCP, CBIST

Direct Line: 813-974-1282

Email: cdillahuntas@usf.edu

Chih-Chin Chou, Ph.D., CRC (Faculty Investigator) is the Program Director for the RMHC program. Dr. Chou comes from the University of Arizona where she has been a tenured Associate Professor and Rehabilitation Counseling Program Coordinator in the Department of Disability and Psycho-educational Studies. She received her PhD in rehabilitation psychology with a minor in educational psychology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2004. Dr. Chou's research interests include psychiatric rehabilitation, research methodology, social support, vocational outcomes for people with disabilities, rehabilitation education, international rehabilitation, and positive psychology. She has published over 25 articles in peer-reviewed journals and eight book chapters. Dr. Chou has received numerous grants including three current training grants totaling almost \$2.5 million.

Chih-Chin Chou, Ph.D., C.R.C.,

Direct Line: 813-974-6233

Email: chouc@usf.edu

University of South Florida
Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling
13301 Bruce B. Downs Blvd - MHC1632
Tampa, Florida 33612-3899
Main Phone: 813-974-2855 Fax: 813-974-8080

Appendix C: Professional Organizations and Resources

1. **NRA (National Rehabilitation Association):** <http://www.nationalrehab.org/>
Publication: *Journal of Rehabilitation and Contemporary Rehabilitation*
Note: NRA has several divisions.
2. **NRCA (National Rehabilitation Counseling Association):** <http://nrca-net.org/>
Publication: *Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling*
3. **ACA (American Counseling Association):** <https://www.counseling.org/>
Publication: Several
Note: ACA has several divisions.
4. **ARCA (American Rehabilitation Counseling Association)– Division of ACA**
<http://www.arcaweb.org/>
Publication: *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*
5. **NCRE (National Council on Rehabilitation Education):** <http://www.ncre.org/>
Publication: *Rehabilitation Research, Policy, and Education*
6. **APSE (Association for Persons in Supported Employment):** <http://www.apse.org/>
Publication: *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*
7. **IARP (International Association of Rehabilitation Professionals):**
<http://www.rehabpro.org/>
Publication: *The Rehabilitation Professional; Journal of Life Care Planning*

Appendix D: Frequently Asked Questions

✚ **When in the scholarship award process must the scholar sign the payback agreement?**

Students receiving scholarship assistance from the RSA grant must sign and date the Scholar Payback Agreement prior to the initial disbursement of any scholarship funds on his/her behalf, including the payment or crediting of tuition. The institution must fully disclose to the RSA scholar the terms and conditions of the payback requirement in the application for an RSA scholarship.

✚ **What financial aid is included in the payback requirement?** The requirement applies to all RSA financial assistance to a scholar including payments for tuition, stipends, books, fees, travel and other approved expenses.

✚ **How is an academic year defined for purposes of the payback requirement?** An academic year means a full time course of study 1) for a period totaling at least 9 months; or 2) for the equivalent of at least 2 semesters. The employment obligation of a part-time scholar is based on the accumulated academic years of training for which scholarship aid is received. Work requirements for portions of an academic year are prorated.

✚ **When a scholar receives partial funding, what are the payback requirements?** The amount of financial assistance you receive, whether partial or full, does not affect the obligation of the scholar to meet employment commitment. The employment obligation for a part-time scholar will be based on the "accumulated academic years" of training for which you received assistance.

✚ **What is the relationship between the amount of time that a student receives a scholarship and the length of time that he/she must maintain employment to meet payback requirements?** As of June 1, 1992, the student must satisfy the following employment obligation: a) The student must work in a State vocational agency, a non-profit rehabilitation agency, or a related agency, including a professional practice group

through which the individual has a service arrangement with the State vocational rehabilitation agency; b) The length of the employment obligation is the full-time equivalent of 2 years for each year of scholarship assistance provided; c) students may work on a part-time basis as long as the employment obligation is satisfied during the period of time allotted.

- ✦ **How much time does the student have to meet the payback requirements?** The period of time that the scholar has in order to satisfy the employment obligation begins immediately upon the completion of the training and lasts for the duration of the employment obligation plus a grace period of two more years.
- ✦ **If a scholar is dismissed or drops out of a program for academic or non-academic reasons, to what degree is he/she be liable for payback?** The scholar is liable for repayment of the costs received if he/she is dismissed or voluntarily leave the program for academic or non-academic reasons. If he/she seeks to meet the obligation through employment, the employment must be in a position as defined in the regulations. Circumstances for deferrals and exceptions are described in the regulations. If you drop out of the program, the 2-year grace period does not apply. Repayment must begin immediately.
- ✦ **Must scholars work on a full-time basis in a qualifying agency?** No. A scholar may work on a full or part-time basis for the State rehabilitation agency or a related agency, facility, or qualifying organization. If a scholar works part-time, s/he still has an obligation to work the full-time equivalent of two years for each year for which assistance was provided within a period of not more than the sum of the number of years owed and two additional years.
- ✦ **What is meant by a "related agency?"** The State-Federal programs of vocational rehabilitation, supported employment, and independent living are the programs intended to benefit from the payback provision. Congress recognized, however, that

State rehabilitation agencies often accomplish their mission through agreements with other programs. Thus, the employment obligation may be met by obtaining and maintaining employment, in the field in which the scholar was trained, in a nonprofit or related agency providing services under an agreement with a State rehabilitation agency. When seeking employment an RSA scholar should first check with his/her appropriate training institution to obtain a listing of employment sites that meet the statutory and regulatory definition of “acceptable employment.” Second, the student should determine if the potential employer meets the definition of acceptable employment (public or non-profit, or related agency, facility, or service provider). The employer should also be able to provide information regarding whether the program, agency, or facility provides services to clients of the State vocational rehabilitation (VR) agency, or whether it has a cooperative working agreement regarding the referral or provision of services to VR clients. If additional information is needed, an RSA scholar may wish to contact the State VR agency to obtain additional information.

Note: RMHC is required to document that the State rehabilitation agency has an agreement with the RSA scholar’s employer in the area of specialty. An agreement may be an arrangement by a related agency to accept referrals and provide services to rehabilitation clients, or a purchase of service or contractual arrangement with a service provider.

- ✚ **Does volunteer work count towards the payback requirement?** No. Volunteer work does not count towards the payback work requirement.

- ✚ **Must scholars serve State rehabilitation clients exclusively in full or part-time employment in a qualifying agency?** If a scholar works for a related agency, s/he is not required to serve only rehabilitation clients of the State-Federal programs of vocational rehabilitation, supported employment, or independent living in his/her job. Rather, the requirement can be met if he/she is employed on a full- or part-time basis by the qualifying organization, and the work is on a continuing basis as a consultant or

practitioner serving rehabilitation clients under an agreement with the State vocational rehabilitation agency.

- ✦ **If a scholar engages in employment for a State agency or related rehabilitation agency while in training, will that count toward payback?** Rehabilitation employment while in training for which the scholarship was awarded does not meet the work requirement. Regulations state that the scholar will maintain employment in a qualifying agency “beginning after the recipient completes the training for which the scholarship was awarded.”
- ✦ **What information in addition to this handbook will help an RSA scholar and the granting institution to understand their responsibilities in complying with the payback requirements?** Scholars and institutions must become familiar with the final regulations published in the FEDERAL REGISTER on June 16, 1994 [59 FR 31060]. As a condition of receiving this grant, scholars and institutions are required to comply with the rules. The regulations spell out the payback provisions and the scholar’s requirements to comply with them. Training institutions should identify additional rehabilitation information, such as names and addresses of qualifying employers, for use in assisting scholars.
- ✦ **What is the “exit certification” that the grantee must provide in writing when a scholar completes his/her program?** According to 386/34(f), the granting institution is required to maintain the following information on file for each scholarship:
 1. The scholar’s name and identifying information on the Federal grant that provided the scholarship;
 2. The scholar’s field of study;
 3. The number of years the scholar needs to work to satisfy the work requirement;
 4. The total amount of the scholarship assistance provided subject to the payback provision;
 5. The time period during which the scholar must satisfy the work requirements

6. All the other obligations the scholar must meet, such as the need to inform the training institution of any change of name, address, employment status, and information documenting s/he has satisfied the terms of his/her scholarship agreement.

The exit certification must include written verification from the scholar acknowledging that the information in his/her file is accurate and that s/he is aware of his/her payback obligation.

✚ **Does RSA specify the geographical location in which the work requirement must be satisfied?** Regulations implementing the payback requirement do not specify the geographical location in which the work requirement must be satisfied. An RSA scholar may select where he or she wishes to seek and maintain employment, provided that within the required period of time following the completion of her or her training, the employment obligation is fulfilled with a State agency or related program.

✚ **Under what circumstances may a scholar receive an exception to the repay requirements?** Before disbursement of a scholarship, grantees are required to obtain documentation that the individual has expressed interest in a career in the provision of rehabilitation services and that the individual expects to maintain or seek employment in an approved agency. Scholars are not required to repay if you are unable to continue their course of study or complete their employment due to severe disability that is expected to continue indefinitely or result in death, or if, in fact, you should die.

✚ **Under what circumstances may repayment of a scholarship be deferred?** Repayment of a scholarship may be deferred during the time the scholar is:

1. engaging in a full-time course of study at an institution of higher education;
2. serving, not in excess of three years, on active duty as a member of the armed services of the United States;
3. serving as a volunteer under the Peace Corps Act;

4. serving as a full-time volunteer under Title I of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973;
5. temporarily totally disabled, for a period not to exceed three years; or
6. unable to secure employment as required by the agreement by reason of the care provided to a disabled spouse for a period not to exceed twelve months.

✚ **How would a scholar obtain a deferral or exception for one of the reasons listed above?** The scholar, or when necessary, the legally responsible person acting on his/her behalf, must submit a written application and documentation to the Commissioner, Rehabilitation Services Administration, U.S. Department of Education, 550 12th Street, SW, Washington, D.C. 20202.

✚ **To whom must the scholar report his/her whereabouts, jobs, or noncompliance with the terms of his/her agreement?** The academic institution, which administered the RSA training grant, is responsible for keeping track of the location of scholars supported under the training grant, and their employment until the payback requirements are met. Regulations state that the individual scholar is responsible for notifying the granting institution about changes in his/her address, employment, or other significant facts related to completion of the payback requirement. A reasonable approach that would comply with the institution's tracking responsibility would be to contact each former scholar once a year, with a follow-up mailing if he/she does not respond. If an institution experiences difficulty in locating a scholar, it is required to check with existing tracking systems operated by alumni organizations.

✚ **What types of reports must institutions that accept RSA training grants make to the Department of Education about scholars?** Training institutions (grantees) are required to file the "RSA Training Payback Reporting Form" within 30 days after the end of each project budget period for which the training institution is funded. This form will allow RSA to obtain sufficient information in order to determine whether RSA scholar program meets its broad purpose and to submit reports to Congress on whether scholars meet

their work requirements. The Payback Reporting Form must be submitted by the grantee each year until all scholars have completed their work obligations in order for the grantee to receive Federal scholarship funding. Thus, forms will be submitted for a number of years beyond which the project is supported with Federal funds. Training institutions must report ALL scholars to whom scholarships have been provided since 1987. Failure to report scholars may result in a cost disallowance found through an audit and may affect their ability to receive future grants.

- ✚ **When does a scholar enter financial “repayment” status?** Financial repayment status begins when it is apparent that all or part of the employment obligation will not be fulfilled by the payback completion date. Specifically, financial repayment status begins on the first day of the first calendar month after the earliest of the following dates, as applicable: 1) The date an RSA scholar informs the Commissioner of RSA that s/he does not plan to fulfill the employment obligation under the agreement, 2) any date when the RSA scholar’s failure to begin or maintain employment makes it impossible for him/her to complete his/her employment obligation within the number of years required. If an RSA scholar partially meets his/her employment requirements, s/he must repay a prorated sum based upon the years/months of unmet employment in the payback agreement.

- ✚ **What happens if an RSA scholar’s employment obligation is not completed?** According to the terms and conditions of the RSA scholar’s written agreement with his/her training institution, s/he must repay the amount of scholarship not satisfied through employment, as well as the interest on the unpaid balance of the scholarship owed, and reasonable collection costs, as determined by the Secretary of Education. Interest charged is variable and is based on language contained in 34 CFR 386.34 and 34 CFR 386.43; 31 U.S.C. 3717.

- ✦ **Who collects the funds if a scholar does not fulfill the payback requirement through qualifying employment?** The Secretary of the Department of Education is responsible for collecting the funds if the scholar does not comply with the regulations.

- ✦ **What recourse do scholars have to appeal a finding of non-compliance with the regulations for the payback provision?** Appeals should be directed to the Commissioner of RSA, U.S. Department of Education, 550 12th Street, SW, Washington, D.C. 20202-2800. The Commissioner will acknowledge all such appeals in writing.