

BEFORE THE MISSISSIPPI STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS FOR
LICENSED PROFESSIONAL COUNSELORS

IN THE MATTER OF
THE APPLICATION FOR
LICENSE OF
SHAREKA MACON JEFFERSON

CAUSE NO. 2021-21

FINDINGS OF FACT, CONCLUSIONS OF LAW
AND FINAL DECISION OF THE BOARD

A hearing was held before the Mississippi Board of Licensed Professional Counselors (“Board”) on August 13, 2021 in the matter of the application for a licensee to be a professional counselor submitted by Ms. Shareka Macon Jefferson, Cause No. 2020-21, said application having been previously denied by the Board, at which hearing testimony was heard and documents reviewed. A quorum of the Board was present to deliberate on this matter. The Board was represented by Alexis E. Morris, Esq. Jefferson was represented by L. Nicole Clinkscales, Esq. After considering said evidence, the Board has made the following findings of fact, conclusions of law and final decision.

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. Shareka Macon Jefferson most recently applied for a provisional licensed professional counselor (P-LPC, which is a necessary precursor to being a fully licensed professional counselor, LPC) on March 10, 2021. (She had applied at least once prior to this application, and been denied. These proceedings concern the most recent application and denial.)
2. The Board officially denied her application on May 15, 2015, stating as the reason: “Degree: MS [Master of Science] in Adult Continuing Education is not a qualifying degree for the P-LPC/LPC.” (Ex. 2)
3. Jefferson thereafter requested a hearing on the matter. (Ex. 3)

4. Jefferson obtained an online graduate degree from the University of West Alabama (“UWA”), her degree at the time being titled Master of Science in Continuing Education with an emphasis in Counseling and Psychology. The applicable 2009-2010 school catalog refers to the program of study as conferring a “Degree of Master of Science in Continuing Education – Counseling/Psychology.” (Ex. 14) Her diploma actually read “Master of Science in Continuing Education in Counseling and Psychology.”

5. By virtue of the above-referenced degree, Jefferson has since been certified by the National Board for Certified Counselors as a National Certified Counselor (NCC) and has become a member of the American Counseling Association. She has also been certified by the state’s Department of Mental Health, where she is employed, as a “Certified Mental Health Therapist.” (Ex. 5, 6)

6. The licensing requirements as set out by the legislature are in relevant part as follows:

(1) The board shall issue a license as a provisional licensed professional counselor, without regard to race, religion, sex or national origin, to each applicant who furnishes satisfactory evidence of the following:

(f) The applicant shall have a minimum acceptable graduate semester hour or acceptable quarter-hour master’s degree as determined by section 73–30-5 primarily in counseling or related counseling field from a regionally or nationally accredited college or university program in counselor education or a related counseling program subject to Mississippi State Board of Examiners for Licensed Professional Counselor’s approval. All applicants shall provide official transcript of all graduate work.

Miss. Code Section 73-30-9. (Emphasis added)

7. Accordingly, the Board has expounded upon the statutory provision in its regulations as follows:

For degrees conferred after January 1, 2017, the board will only except sixty (60) semester hours or ninety (90) quarter-hour masters degree programs. Those programs shall be either CACREP degree programs

or degree programs with the word counseling in its title and meet the structure of CACREP as it specifically pertains to the twelve (12) courses specified, ...

Regulations, Part 2201, Chapter 4, Rule 4.2.

8. The program of study at UWA is not accredited by CACREP (the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs).

9. Because the program is not a CACREP program, the program must meet the Board's approval, as outlined in Rule 4.2 above. Specifically, the degree must (1) contain the word "counseling" in its degree title AND (2) "meet the structure of CACREP as it specifically pertains to the twelve (12) courses specified." (The 12 specified courses are the required courses of study mentioned elsewhere in the Regulations.).

9. As testified to at the hearing by Dr. Strebeck, technically, Jefferson's degree is not in counseling per se; rather, it is a continuing or adult education with *an emphasis in* counseling. As such, it does not meet the regulatory requirement that the title of the degree contain the word "counseling" in it. The UWA catalog stated that the degree was for personal development or preparation for certain professional areas. For that reason, it also instructs students considering such a degree to check with the requirements of their own state to see if it meets their state's requirement for certification.

10. Moreover, and more significantly, the *structure* of the course of study was not similar in any regard to a CACREP course of study. As explained by Dr. Strebeck, the primary differences between a CACREP program of study and the UWA degree, as demonstrated by the evidence, are: (1) a CACREP program requires 700 hours, while the UWA program is only 200 hours; (2) the UWA program did not include an internship, while a CACREP does; and (3) the UWA program did not include all twelve (12) courses of study required by a CACREP program.

10. In addition to the UWA program of study not being structured like a CACREP program, Jefferson only completed 57 hours of study, while the Board requires 60 hours, as evidenced by the Rule cited above.

11. The UWA catalog itself provides that the UWA program of study which Jefferson undertook was designed for ongoing adult education, for enhancement and personal development, not for licensing or certification. Indeed, an excerpt from the catalog applicable to the year of Jefferson's education, expressly states:

This degree is designed to meet the needs of those students who are interested in pursuing work as a means of personal development and/or preparation for certain professional areas requiring a master's degree.

(Ex. 4, page 49, "Degree of Master of Science in Continuing Education – General")

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

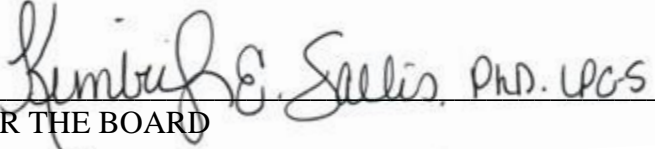
The Board determines that the degree awarded to Jefferson unfortunately does not meet the educational requirements required by the Board for a provisional licensed professional counselor, in that:

1. The program of study, while it technically contains the word "counseling," is not *in* counseling and the school catalog explains that it is intended for personal development and enhancement;
2. It does not meet the structure of CACREP in that (1) a CACREP program requires 700 hours, while the UWA program is only 200 hours; (2) the UWA program did not include an internship, while CACREP does; and (3) the UWA program did not include all twelve (12) courses of study required by a CACREP program; and
3. The UWA program only contained, or Jefferson only completed, 57 total semester hours, while the Board requires 60.

FINAL DECISION

Therefore, the Board denies Jefferson's application to be for a provisionally licensed professional counselor.

SO ORDERED, this the 13th day of August, 2021.



FOR THE BOARD