

Good morning LPC Board Members,

My name is Hannah Shirley and I recently applied for the LPC in the state of Kansas. I wanted to first say thank you for all your hard work you do as volunteers to help decide who can practice in the state. I know that this is a sacrifice each month to come together to go over applications. Second, I wanted to write to tell you about my situation and lastly, share my thoughts on the requirements for “in residence” hours.

I recently graduated with my Master of Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from Divine Mercy University. After graduation, I started looking for jobs and in July 2020, I received a job offer from the Center for Healing, LLC in Kansas City. I accepted the job and started the application process for the LPC in the state of Kansas. I searched for clear answers on regulations for my online non-accredited school by calling the contact on the website, but had multiple emails and voicemails never returned. Eventually I learned of the “in-residence” regulation, but this was a while after I had moved. I noticed that this regulation seems to question the legitimacy of online platforms as a way to form future counselors, thus I wanted to elaborate on my own experience with an online graduate school for counseling.

To begin, each week I had papers to write, therapy videos to watch, books to read, and video calls to attend to. The material alone required a lot of discipline to complete. I would meet with professors every week over Zoom to listen to live lectures and to have my questions answered that had come up from the material. There were various classes that I met with classmates for hours over Zoom to practice couple’s counseling, group counseling, individual counseling, and play therapy. We would have to record these sessions, dictate them, watch them over, find mistakes, get feedback from classmates, and try to improve the skills in the next session.

For the classes such as Ethics, Helping Skills, and Counseling Practicum I traveled to my school in Virginia to go through an in-person residency. I liked to call these residencies “boot camps”. They included 5 days of intensive training where we role played for 20 hours out of the weekend and our professors made sure we met the standards for in-person therapy. Our teachers worked intently with us with our weaknesses and failures to learn from them and build us up as therapists.

In addition to the material I learned and the various ways of learning it, I am also confident that my classes were made with the standards of CACREP in mind. At the end of each class I filled out surveys on whether or not my class had met requirements for CACREP accreditation. Looking back, I can say that there wasn’t a single class that stands out as not meeting the various requirements. My graduate school’s coursework was meticulously planned for CACREP accreditation and they have already begun the process of being approved.

Next, I would like to share a few thoughts about the regulation on in-residence training, as well as a few questions. While I definitely prefer seeing a client’s face in person than over a Zoom call, 2020 has forced me to consider the effectiveness of online platforms. I am sure each of you have your own experiences with this. How has your practice been since COVID hit? Have online platforms provided opportunities and extended the reach of your practice? Are there ways they have hindered your practice? I’m curious to hear your honest experience on this. I noticed

in my internship that when COVID hit, we had positives and negatives. Some clients did not like the Zoom platform, but others opened up like never before. I noticed that important information was revealed for those clients who could not make the session, or did not want me to see their house, or had quality of life problems that I had not seen before. In unexpected ways, online platforms revealed opportunities for conversations that needed to be had.

In regards to the regulation, I believe it appropriate to ask: are online trainings legitimate? Have you or anyone you know had an experience with continued education courses that were life-changing but happened to be online? During the pandemic, a colleague of mine went through online EMDR training. He was shocked by the quality of the training and raved about its efficacy when implemented with clients.

I could continue on with the various graduate schools that have been forced to move to online platforms, and whether or not their classes are legitimate now under Kansas law. Are they better off than I was? My school was structured meticulously around online platforms whereas other schools had to haphazardly piece together something that worked.

In closing, I know I may not ever hear the answers to these questions, but I thought they were worth considering. I hope this sparks further discussion around this regulation by which my application was rejected, especially within the current circumstances. I don't envy the work you may have to tackle with various applications of "in-resident" counseling graduates who faced COVID-19 changing their means of learning to online platforms. I truly believe that they still received legitimate formation, as I believe the same of my own.

Thank you so much for reading this letter, and again, I am appreciative of the time you give to Kansas. It is a great place to live! If you need anyone in the future to speak about their experience with online education, I would be happy to help.

Thank you,

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