



October 20, 2016

Dear College and University Representative,

The Autism Insurance Law (Act 62 of 2008) established a licensing process for individuals who provide behavior specialist services to children and adolescents with autism in Pennsylvania. As a result, the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Department of State (DOS) are sending this letter to accredited colleges and universities to inform them of the need for comprehensive graduate programs designed to enable graduates to obtain a Behavior Specialist license upon graduation. Comprehensive graduate programs would allow an applicant for a Behavior Specialist license to fulfill all of the educational, training, and experiential requirements for the license, prior to graduation.

The number of children with autism in Pennsylvania is expected to grow significantly, and the need for qualified professionals to work with this population will also increase. Because you are one of Pennsylvania's leading educational institutions, our Departments think that you may be interested in enhancing your existing programs or developing a new program to meet this need.

A program that enables students to graduate ready to apply for the license would include the following components:

- A Master's (or higher) degree or a Post Master's Certificate in certain specified fields;
- 90 hours of evidence-based coursework in eight specified content areas;
- 1,000 hours of in-person clinical experience; and
- One year of experience involving Functional Behavior Assessments (FBAs).

The attached guidance includes additional information on each of these requirements; provides information on how to enhance or develop content area coursework; clarifies what does and does not qualify toward the 90-hour coursework requirement; and lists acceptable methods for students to meet the experience requirements.

DHS and DOS are committed to ensuring that children with autism have access to qualified professionals, and we need your assistance in achieving this goal. We are happy to answer any questions you may have as you consider enhancing your programming to enable students to graduate ready to qualify for a Behavior Specialist license. Please contact Ms. Shannon Fagan, Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse (OMHSAS), at [shafagan@pa.gov](mailto:shafagan@pa.gov) or 717-772-7763 with any questions.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dennis Marion".

Dennis Marion  
Deputy Secretary, OMHSAS  
Department of Human Services

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marilyn J. Heine, MD".

Marilyn Heine, MD  
Board Chair, State Board of Medicine  
Department of State

# How Colleges and Universities Can Help Students Graduate with the Qualifications Needed for a Behavior Specialist License

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to accredited colleges and universities that are interested in developing graduate-level coursework or programs that enable students to graduate with all of the requirements needed to qualify for a Behavior Specialist license in Pennsylvania.

## Overview of the *Autism Insurance Act Requirements for Behavior Specialist Licensure*

The Autism Insurance Law (Act 62 of 2008) established a licensing process for individuals who provide behavior specialist services to children and adolescents with autism in Pennsylvania. It also required the Board of Medicine, in consultation with the Department of Human Services, to promulgate regulations to provide for licensure of Behavior Specialists.

### To be eligible for a Behavior Specialist license, applicants must have the following:

- a Master's (or higher) degree or a Post Master's Certificate, from a board-approved, accredited college or university, in *Behavioral Analysis; Special Education; Speech Therapy; Psychology (School, Clinical, Counseling or Developmental); Professional Counseling; Social Work; Occupational Therapy; Nursing;* or in a field related to a named field
- documented evidence of experience involving functional behavior assessments
- documented clinical experience with individuals who exhibit behavioral challenges
- verification of completion of 90 hours of evidence-based coursework or training in the following content areas:
  - Professional Ethics (3 hours)
  - Assessment Coursework or Training (16 hours)
  - Crisis Intervention (8 hours)
  - Family Collaboration (5 hours)
  - Autism-specific Coursework/Training (18 hours)
  - Instructional Strategies & Best Practices (16 hours)
  - Co-morbidity & Medications (8 hours)
  - Addressing Specific Skill Deficits Training (16 hours)

Accredited colleges and universities have an opportunity to design graduate-level programs that include components which enable students to complete the following prior to graduation:

- ◆ Achieve a degree in a named or related field
- ◆ Meet the 90-hour coursework requirement
- ◆ Meet the clinical experience requirement
- ◆ Meet the Functional Behavior Assessment experience requirement

## **90-Hour Content Area Coursework Requirement:**

The Bureau of Autism Services has developed content area descriptions that meet the requirements for obtaining a Behavior Specialist license. The comprehensive ***Content Area Descriptions for Licensure*** overview has been included at the end of this packet as guidance. This guide should be used by colleges and universities to develop courses with content that aligns with the 90-hour requirement. BAS does not review the coursework developed by accredited colleges or universities.

### **Important Considerations**

- To qualify toward the license, individuals must have completed **90 hours** of evidence-based coursework. The average graduate level course is 72 hours. It is not possible to develop a single course that enables students to meet the entire requirement. Schools should not attempt to create one single course to meet all of the requirements.
- Hours spent in class do not directly correlate to the number of training hours a class qualifies toward. Completing 72 hours within a class does not mean that the student has earned 72 hours toward the licensure requirements. The number of hours earned toward licensure requirements is solely dependent on the number of hours of content delivered that is aligned with one or more of the eight content area descriptions.
- A course or class session may be applied toward more than one content area. Although some content may fall within the scope of more than one of the eight categories, the same content cannot be counted toward more than one of the category requirements. Coursework can be applied toward one OR the other content area, but not both. For example, there is a lot of overlap in content that would qualify toward the Instructional Strategies and Skill Deficits categories. Decisions will need to be made as the course is developed about which category the content will be applied toward.

#### **CONTENT AREAS (90 hours):**

Professional Ethics (3 hours)

Assessment Coursework or Training (16 hours)

Crisis Intervention (8 hours)

Family Collaboration (5 hours)

Autism-specific Coursework/Training (18 hours)

Instructional Strategies & Best Practices (16 hours)

Co-morbidity & Medications (8 hours)

Addressing Specific Skill Deficits Training (16 hours)

### **Clarification on What Does and Does Not Qualify Toward the 90-hour Coursework Requirement**

It is the purview of each college or university to determine the specific format for coursework that enable students to meet the licensure requirements. However, there are some guidelines to be considered when developing the courses. Below are examples of various course components that are commonly included within graduate level coursework, with clarification about what does and does not qualify toward the 90-hour coursework requirement. Generally, independent work will not meet the requirements.

Qualifies Toward Licensure	Does Not Qualify Toward Licensure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content within a course or class session aligns with at least one of the eight content areas described on the <i>Content Area Descriptions for Licensure</i> document.</li> <li>• Content is evidence-based and current based upon best practices in the field of behavior analysis.</li> <li>• Each course contains a description and objectives, identifying how it is related to the field of behavior analysis.</li> <li>• Face-to-face or direct instruction</li> <li>• Online/virtual courses from an accredited college or university that present the content in ways that assesses a student's ongoing understanding of the material. Using an interactive format is highly recommended for virtual coursework.</li> <li>• PowerPoint presentations delivering direct content</li> <li>• Professor lectures</li> <li>• Use of videos or other media forms</li> <li>• Small group activities to reinforce or apply a learned concept</li> <li>• Group discussion, active student responding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independently reading and studying a book and taking a test</li> <li>• Reading assignments</li> <li>• Time spent conducting research or writing papers</li> <li>• Developing projects outside of class time</li> <li>• Content unrelated to the field of behavior analysis. For example: A class session on Dibbles, an early literacy assessment for young children's academics would not be appropriate to consider for licensure.</li> </ul>

## Developing a Field Practicum Component to Enable Students to Meet Experience Requirements

To be eligible for a Behavior Specialist license, applicants must have clinical experience as well as experience with functional behavior assessments. Colleges and universities that provide a field practicum experience for their graduate students will enable them to be eligible for a Behavior Specialist license upon graduation, which will help them find a job after graduation.

### **Acceptable Experience with Functional Behavior Assessments (FBAs)**

An applicant for a Behavior Specialist license must have at least 1 year of in-person experience involving functional behavior assessments of individuals under 21 years of age. This includes the development of behavioral treatment plans as well as the implementation of behavioral supports or treatment plans.

## **Acceptable Clinical Experience**

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An applicant for a Behavior Specialist license must have completed 1,000 hours of in-person clinical experience with individuals with behavioral challenges (not necessarily autism) OR 1,000 hours of experience in a related field with individuals with autism spectrum disorder.

Experience gained subsequent to obtaining a bachelor's degree can be counted towards meeting this requirement. The clinical experience can be working with either children OR adults. Examples of experiences that meet the clinical experience requirement include:

- ♦ Employment or verified volunteer work in the following roles:
  - student teacher or teacher in an autistic support class
  - job coach
  - residential program manager
- ♦ Employment or verified volunteer work in the following settings:
  - Special education classroom
  - Community health center
  - Peer support programs/services
  - Group therapy program
  - Summer therapeutic activities program
  - Outpatient recovery center
  - Community based outpatient program
  - Trauma center
  - Crisis call center
  - Suicide prevention lifeline/resource center
- ♦ Internship or field experience (e.g., shadowing) within a behavioral or mental health services provider organization, or other setting supporting individuals with ASD or challenging behaviors

## **Additional Guidance**

### **Documenting Coursework and Experience that Qualifies Toward Licensure**

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The licensure application process is administered by the Board of Medicine, Department of State. In addition to submitting their transcripts, applicants for a Behavior Specialist license will need to submit specific forms to the Board of Medicine as part of their application that document the graduate degree or post-graduate certificate earned, and/or the number of hours earned toward the 90 hour requirement in each of the eight categories.

*Please note:* The following descriptions are not all-inclusive and contain only a few examples of how each content area is defined by the Bureau of Autism Services for the purpose of determining whether it will approve a training. This document can also be used by universities/colleges to develop or evaluate their own coursework.

**ETHICS** A training to fulfill “Ethics” should emphasize moral values, practices, and decisions related to the professional field of behavior analysis (e.g., confidentiality, standards to ensure dignity, health, and safety). *(3 hours required)*

**AUTISM-SPECIFIC** A training to fulfill “Autism-Specific” should focus on information specific to children with autism, including diagnosis and treatment related to communication, social, and behavioral difficulties. *(18 hours required)*

**ASSESSMENTS** A training to fulfill “Assessments” should focus on specific methods to assess and treat problematic behaviors, including the use of a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) and other assessment tools (e.g., MAS, FAI, standardized assessments, job assessments) to identify needs of children with autism. *(16 hours required)*

**INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES AND BEST PRACTICES** A training to fulfill “Instructional Strategies and Best Practices” should highlight strategies to effectively teach skills that promote self-determination and independence, including strategies that are data-based and collaborative (e.g., systematic planning, goals and objectives, fading and prompting systems, task analyses, generalization). *(16 hours required)*

**CRISIS INTERVENTION** A training to fulfill “Crisis Intervention” should focus on strategies to ensure health and safety of children with autism that are beyond the strategies detailed in the child’s Behavior Support Plan. *(8 hours required)*

**CO-MORBIDITY AND MEDICATION** A training to fulfill “Co-morbidity and Medication” should focus on the prevalence of and treatment of autism and other co-existing conditions (e.g., mental health, substance abuse). Trainings related to medication management or impact of medication for children with autism would also fulfill this content area requirement. *(8 hours required)*

**FAMILY COLLABORATION** A training to fulfill “Family Collaboration” should focus on collaborating and teaming with families to address dynamics that may impact supports and services for children with autism (e.g., parental stress, siblings, resistance to service delivery). *(5 hours required)*

**SPECIFIC SKILL DEFICITS** A training to fulfill “Specific Skill Deficits” should focus on teaching specific skills to children with autism to increase independence, replace problem behaviors, and quality of life (e.g., social skills, sexuality, communication, daily living, employment-related skills). *(16 hours required)*