



January 12, 2024

Montana State University, Billings
1500 University Drive
Billings, MT 59101

Dear Dr. Shu-Chen Tsai,

On behalf of the Association for Behavior Analysis International (ABAI) Accreditation Board, I write to inform you that the Board has deferred its decision on the re-accreditation of the M.S. in Special Education, Advanced Studies, Applied Behavior Analysis Emphasis program, pending the receipt of evidence that the program has made specific improvements within two years. In accordance with item 3-1-103, from the ABAI Accreditation Handbook, the previous grant of accreditation of the master's program is automatically extended during the deferral period through **December 31, 2025**.

To help the program address these concerns, the Board first requests a progress report on its developments this year. Specifically, the report must address the progress and details of the faculty composition and workload (e.g., teaching responsibilities, supervision, and professional development), and it must include details about the systems and opportunities in place to ensure all students have sufficient advising and experiential learning. Each of these areas are detailed below. The progress report must be submitted by **November 15, 2024**.

The Board agreed with the site visit report, there are commendable aspects to the master's program. The program has historically been a good training program and there is a continued commitment to providing high levels of instruction, valuable academic and support resources, and support from the administration. At a time when there has been a complete changeover in the program faculty and implications from the COVID-19 pandemic, the program has remained strong in its mission, and we commend you for that. We also echo the sentiments shared by the site visitors and commend Dr. Gregory's dedication to leading the program through its transition.

To ensure the program is well-positioned to sustain its continued growth and developments the Board requests attention to the following areas of concern:

Faculty Resources – Standard 6. The Board raised concern about the program's overall faculty resources given the faculty's inexperience and time in the program. Additionally, if the department continues to grow the undergraduate program, the Board recommends the



hiring of a third, full-time doctoral-level faculty member to sustain the growth and workload for teaching and supervision across both programs.

In the progress report, the Board requests evidence of the program administrator's role and the support provided for Dr. Tsai to successfully carry out the responsibilities (Standard 4-103). Additionally, the report must provide details about the core, full-time doctoral-level faculty, and their workload/responsibilities (Standard 6-100). Lastly, it should include a description of the direction of the program and evidence of adequate resources (faculty, fiscal, physical) to support the faculty workload.

Supervised Experiential Learning – Standard 9-108. Another area needing attention is how the program arranges Supervised Experiential Learning. It may be the case that the program continues to arrange for the thesis/equivalent activities and projects to fulfill these 90 hours, or the program may arrange for formal practicum courses. However, it is imperative that the program provide evidence that all students, regardless of thesis/equivalent project type, receive 90 hours of supervised experience. The Board agrees with the site visitors' recommendations, that the Institute for Neurodiversity provides a unique opportunity for faculty research and student experiential learning, along with providing valuable services to the community.

In the progress report, the Board requests evidence of developed plans for collecting and documenting student experiential learning, as articulated in your response letter. Please also include information about the supervised experiential learning arrangements when student's theses/equivalent projects are not experimental or applied in nature (e.g., systematic literature reviews).

Student Advising and Outcomes – Standards 7-103 and 3-101. Lastly, the Board raised concerns about student advising processes (Standard 7-103) and attrition (Standard 3-101), which may be attributed to the changes in faculty and program operations in recent years as well as the implications from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Board will continue to monitor this area as the program moves forward with the changes articulated in your response letter.

In the progress report, the Board requests evidence of improvements to the student advising process and its cohesion with the student handbook. Please also include any updates to the course sequencing or supervision and mentorship practices that might change as improvements are made in this area.

The report must be submitted by November 15, 2024, so the Board can review the program's progress during this deferral period. The Accreditation Handbook, section 7-1-101 – Progress Reports, states:



A program may be required to submit a report on its progress in correcting any areas of concern identified by the ABAI Accreditation Board in the accreditation decision letter. The program reports on its continuous improvement efforts, including any new initiatives since the most recent site visit, and its efforts toward improvement based on ongoing self-assessment. The ABAI Accreditation Board may take any of the actions described in Title III if its analysis of a progress report indicates that a program is no longer in compliance with one or more accreditation requirements.

Please note section 3-1-105 of the Handbook, which indicates that the Board may withdraw the current grant of accreditation if it finds that the program has not demonstrated its compliance with the Board's standards, policies, and procedures.

The Board understands that this is not the decision you sought. The Board respects the program at Montana State University, Billings, and its success as a training program. By extending the accreditation of the master's program during the deferral period, the Board believes it has acted as generously as its governance policy allows.

As the master's program remains accredited, the program is required to pay an annual sustaining fee as described in Title VII Section 7-1-104 of the Accreditation Handbook, and to remain in compliance with the Board's policies and procedures. I would like to call special attention to three important policies related to public disclosure. Your program is required to:

1. share the program's accreditation status and display the Board's masters-level accreditation seal on the program's website. (See the Board's *Policy on Public Disclosure of Accreditation Status*.) The copy of the current version of the seal is included in the email. Thank you for your recent updates to the website!
2. display on your website a prominent link to the aggregate report of the program's student outcomes that is posted on the Board's website. The link to your program's aggregate report is: <https://accreditation.abainternational.org/apply/accredited-programs/montana-state-university-billings.aspx> (See Title IX, Chapter 3 of the *Accreditation Handbook*.)
3. submit an annual report and annual fee, normally due April 1 of each year, as described in Title VII of the *Accreditation Handbook*, using the form posted at <https://forms.gle/hjStiMjAu2FduRp79>. We received your 2022 annual report information – thank you. We will provide additional information soon regarding the 2023 annual report submission.

The aforementioned policies can be found via the "Documents" tab at <https://accreditation.abainternational.org>.) As program administrator, you should familiarize yourself with the materials in this section of the Board's website.



If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me – I am available to help. I will be glad to discuss the Board's requirements with you and, if you would like, we can include Ben Witts, the Board Coordinator, in the discussion to help guide the program.

We look forward to the continued developments and improvements of the program.

Sincerely,

--

Jenna Mrljak, Ph.D., BCBA
Deputy Director: Boards and Committees
Association for Behavior Analysis International
ABAIaccreditation@ABAInternational.org

cc: Ben Witts, Ph.D., IBA, BCBA-D
ABAI Accreditation Board Coordinator