

Membership Category Changes: FAQs

Regarding the change of Clinical Fellow from status to designation: Since it is now decoupled from licensure, does this change mean that newly licensed MFTs will not be able to apply for or obtain this designation without additional time post-licensure?

No, those licensed (new or current licensed MFTs) in the US qualify for the Clinical Fellow Designation just as they previously qualified for the Clinical Fellow membership category. Elevating it to a designation allows us to highlight those members with the highest level of training and who have practiced systemic therapy under supervision. All current active Clinical Fellow members will be Professional members and automatically granted the Clinical Fellow Designation and do not need to apply. Newly licensed MFTs that were not Clinical Fellow members by June 1st will need to ensure that they are active Professional members and then may apply for the Clinical Fellow Designation once they have achieved their license in MFT in their state.

Are you doing away with Clinical Fellow membership category?

No, we are elevating this to a designation. All current Clinical Fellows are being grandfathered into the new designation as of June 1st.

Why are PhD MFT students being forced to the new Professional member category and can no longer be students? We don't have the money.

PhD students will be elevated to the new professional members category BUT we are giving them a discounted rate for 4 years while they complete their programs. The discount rate is equal to the student dues rate. This elevates them to the higher membership category while acknowledging their financial challenges as PhD students. This gives them full rights and benefits.

You are eliminating the Pre-Clinical Fellow category. What happens to me?

Pre-Clinical Fellows shift to the Professional member category. However, we are providing a discounted rate equivalent to the pre-clinical fellow rate for a period of time as they transition into the field.

Since the Clinical Fellowship is now elevated to a designation, and AAMFT's intention is to "reduce barriers by decoupling the status from licensure and instead recognizing those who demonstrate commitment to systemic thought," how will AAMFT determine who and what "demonstrates commitment to systemic thought?" Specifically, what are those requirements, assessments or expectations?

Evaluation of Clinical Designation:

The Clinical Fellow membership category has been tied specifically to licensure since the 90's when AAMFT made licensure the primary path to the Clinical Fellow category.

The previous bylaws stated:

3.02 Clinical Fellows shall have the following qualifications:

3.02.1 Individuals submitting proof of current licensing or certification as a marriage and family therapist in states or provinces with licensing or certification laws approved by the Board, under criteria established by the Board, shall be deemed to have complied with qualifications for membership as a Clinical Fellow. Such individuals shall be accepted as Clinical Fellows of the Association upon submission of evidence of valid state license or certificate, and demonstration of suitable qualities of personal maturity and integrity for the conduct of marriage and family therapy by means established by the Board, or,

3.02.2 Individuals submitting proof of current licensing or certification in a mental health field who have also completed the following criteria:

Educational. Completion of a master's or doctoral degree in marriage and family therapy from a regionally accredited educational institution, or an equivalent course of study and degree as established by the Board.

Clinical. Following receipt of a qualifying degree, completion of two calendar years of work experience in marriage and family therapy under supervision in accordance with standards established by the Board.

This language requiring license or certification and the language for educational requirements created barriers for highly qualified family therapists outside of the US to be approved for membership. Licensure/Certification is not common outside of the US and educational degrees often do not align easily from country to country. Those outside the US often take their family therapy coursework post-degree and we were unable to qualify their degrees for membership. Many also found the language very US centric (due to the licensure requirement/degrees) and exclusionary.

Additionally, while those in the US can use licensure as their credential, we have found that those outside of the US need a designation rather than a membership category when seeking employment, particularly in Canada (not Ontario) and Asia.

The membership change allows AAMFT to simplify our membership categories so that it is clear to those applying, open student membership for the first time to those in undergraduate programs pursuing careers in mental health and create a membership pipeline to higher categories and elevates the Clinical Fellow membership category to a designation which is considered more prestigious, like our Approved Supervisor Designation.

The criteria for being granted the Clinical Fellow Designation still require high levels of training similar to our previous clinical fellow membership category but is modified to allow the highest degree and training and/or license or certification in marriage and family therapy or mental health related field which allows them to practice systemic therapy independently in their geographic (area of jurisdiction) or an equivalent as recognized by the AAMFT Board. Our Board will approve the required standards for each geographic area and ensure training is equivalent. In the US, MFT licensure is still one of the pathways to achieving the designation.

What was the rationale for the membership categories to evolve?

AAMFT has made a commitment to diversity and inclusion with the adoption of our new Diversity and Inclusivity Policy. Membership is one of the key areas in which diversity and inclusivity is a vital aspect of our association. In the United States, members can use licensure as their credential and the Clinical Fellow status, while a pinnacle of our profession, is not required

to practice. Outside of the USA, where systemic family therapy is growing, or where regulation does not exist, members of our profession may need the Clinical Fellow designation rather than a Clinical Fellow membership to gain employment and be able to practice as designations are more highly regarded and sought after.

A designation reflects achievement. This change elevates our Clinical Fellow to a prestigious designation like our Approved Supervision Designation. Current active Clinical Fellow members will be grandfathered into the designation automatically. All Clinical Fellows will be required to renew every two years to validate ability to practice and ensure they are doing continuing education. In the US, that simply requires maintaining an active license as licensure laws already require continuing education. There is an option for those members that are retired and don't have an active license to maintain their designation.

AAMFT's mission is quite simply to advance the practice and profession of marriage and family therapy. AAMFT's Core purpose, as stated in our Strategic Plan, is that AAMFT will be the primary and indispensable resource for those practicing systemic and relational therapies throughout the world. In order to do so, it was vital that we recognize the needs of all systemic therapists and create open pathways for interaction and engagement.

How do the proposed membership category changes help those outside the United States become members?

Decoupling the Clinical Fellow designation from licensure allows more diverse ways to achieving it. In a country with regulation like the United States, the path is clear. In a developing MFT market, where regulation does not exist, AAMFT can provide pathways to the Clinical Fellow designation through platforms such as Teneo, AAMFT's online learning program, or various MFT certificate programs to demonstrate systemic study and understanding.

With the change to the membership categories, PhD students will be elevated to Professional members. Will they be required to pay full Professional Member dues while still a student?

The changes create a both/and situation for PhD students. Under the proposed changes, PhD students will be elevated to the new Professional member category AND, they will receive a discounted rate for four years while they complete their programs. Recognizing the financial challenges, this discounted rate is equal to Student member dues and their status elevates them to recognize their true Professional level, with full rights and benefits, in the profession.

What changed in the Student membership category?

PhD students are now elevated to Professional members and student membership is expanded for the first time to include students in bachelor programs pursuing careers in mental health. This allows AAMFT to identify individuals earlier in their education pathway, guide them to careers in systemic therapy, and create a stronger membership pipeline. Additionally, students are now given the right to vote and add their voice to the future direction of AAMFT and there is a full 3-year rather than a 2-year position dedicated to emerging professionals (students and professional members under 5 years).