Clinical and Counseling Careers in Psychology

Arts and Sciences Career Services
55 Goldwin Smith Hall

Human Ecology Career Development Center
162 Martha Van Rensselaer Hall
Acknowledgments

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We are particularly grateful to Jeff Haugaard, Mark Lenzenweger, and Kristi Lockhart for their comments on the first draft of this booklet. We would also like to thank Margaret Lavery, HD’04, for revising this edition of the booklet.

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Thinking of a Clinical or Counseling Career in Psychology?

WHICH GRADUATE DEGREE DO I CHOOSE?

Several different graduate degrees may prepare you to pursue a clinical or counseling career in psychology; you must determine which one provides the best match for your academic preparation, intellectual interests, and career goals. A brief description of the most commonly pursued degrees follows. For additional information about differences among degrees and related topics, see the following books available in the Human Ecology Career Development Center, 162 MVR or in the Arts and Sciences Career Library, 55 Goldwin Smith Hall.


* Highly recommended

Commonly Pursued Degrees

**Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology**

- A research based degree providing training to be a scientist, scholar, and practitioner. A versatile degree: it allows you to work in mental health settings and hospitals, private practice, research, teaching, and consulting.
- Very competitive admissions standards.
- Programs are typically in university psychology departments, though some are in medical schools.
- Many programs fund you with teaching or research assistantships.
- There is no APA accredited master's degree in clinical psychology.
- Time frame: 4 to 5 years of graduate school, 1 to 2 years of internship, and possibly a postdoctoral position.

**Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology**

- Provides training to be a practitioner, typically in private practice or counseling centers, e.g. university counseling centers. It is also possible to work in mental health centers or hospitals and conduct research. Allows you to teach in counselor education and some psychology departments.
- Programs are usually in university psychology or counselor education departments.
- You can receive a master's degree, and in some states, obtain a license to engage in a private practice with a master’s degree. New York State has recently added a process for individuals with master’s degrees to become licensed. Regulations vary by state. Contact the state to get the latest information (see contact information under licensing below). Some individuals admitted to Ph.D. programs in counseling psychology already have master's degrees in psychology or counseling, others go directly into Ph.D. programs.
- Time frame: 4 years of graduate school, 1 year of internship.

A comparison of clinical psychology and counseling psychology:

While a private practice in clinical and counseling psychology might look very similar and licensing for graduates of APA-accredited programs in both areas is similar, clinical psychologists are more likely to work in health care settings. Clinical psychologists typically work with patients with more severe disorders, while counseling psychologists deal more with
personal growth and adjustment problems. Typically admission for counseling psychology programs is less competitive than clinical psychology programs. You can be admitted to counseling psychology programs without majoring in psychology or related fields, and, in fact, humanities majors are admitted. Prerequisites may be required depending on the school. Clinical psychology programs typically require a more extensive background in psychology and place more emphasis on experimental psychological research. Research methods used by counseling psychologists generally include structured tests, interviews, interest inventories and observations.

Psy.D. in Clinical Psychology
• Provides training to be a practitioner, usually in private practice or community mental health centers. Heavily based on course work and clinical experiential training; less emphasis on research than Ph.D. degrees.
• Programs can be either in free standing professional schools or in universities.
• Typically admission is less competitive than clinical psychology Ph.D. programs. Some programs prefer applicants with more work and life experience.
• Programs often do not provide teaching or research assistantships, so students must fund themselves.
• Time frame: 4 years of graduate school, 1 year of internship. For some programs, graduate school can be completed in 3 years, including summers, followed by 1 year of internship.

M.D. in Psychiatry
• Psychiatry is an area of specialization studied after receiving a medical degree. Typically leads to a practice doing psychiatric diagnosis and therapy. Psychiatrists can prescribe medication, but typically do not perform psychological tests (compared to Ph.D.s in clinical psychology who typically perform tests, but cannot prescribe medication).
• Time frame: 4 years of medical school, 4 years of medical residency.

Master's Degree in School Psychology
• Provides training to become a psychologist in a school setting for those interested in children, families and the schooling process. Allows you to perform testing, assessment, and counseling and provide consultation. A Ph.D. in school psychology provides the opportunity to teach in a school psychology program, but is not an advantage as a practitioner in an elementary or secondary school setting.
• Programs are typically in school psychology or psychology departments, and admission is less competitive than Ph.D. programs in psychology.
• Salaries parallel teachers' pay scales.
• Time frame: 2 years of course work and internships. The number of internships and duration for each varies depending on the program.

Master's Degree in Social Work (M.S.W.)
• Provides training to be a practitioner working in a mental health clinic, hospital, nursing homes, human service agency, or private practice. Allows you to consult with businesses, but not to teach or perform psychological tests. A versatile degree that is increasingly in demand given the trend toward managed health care in the United States. A doctorate provides the opportunity to teach in a social work program, but is not an advantage as a practitioner.
• Programs are typically in university social work departments.
• Admission is less competitive than Ph.D. programs in psychology.
• Time frame: 2 years of course work which includes 450 hours of field placement. Licensure examinations are required and determined by US and Canadian jurisdictions.

Typical hourly rates in private practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychiatrist</td>
<td>$110-160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ph.D. in Clinical or Counseling Psychology or Psy.D.</td>
<td>$80-140</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
M.S.W. $60-100

* Note: Salaries can vary a great deal and the American Psychological Association does not track hourly rates as it may be considered “fixing the market.”

For an annual salary predictor, visit Salary Wizard at www.salary.com and enter job title and geographic location.

**Licensing**

Licensing may have some bearing on your choice of a degree program depending on the career option you hope to pursue. Each state has its own licensing requirements. If you know in which state you want to practice, you may want to find out which programs automatically allow you to sit for the state licensing exam. For information on New York State requirements, call the Office of the Professions within the Department of Education at 518-474-3817, or visit their Web site at http://www.op.nysed.gov/.

When investigating programs you may want to ask questions about how easy it is for graduates to get licensed. If you have questions about whether a specific degree will allow you to be licensed in a particular specialty area in New York State, the Office of the Professions Web site, www.op.nysed.gov, also has helpful information.

**AFTER I CHOOSE A DEGREE, HOW DO I CHOOSE A PROGRAM?**

You will want to attend a program accredited by the American Psychological Association (APA). *Graduate Study in Psychology*, published by the APA, provides the most comprehensive information about different programs. It gives profiles of programs in the United States and Canada, including the theoretical orientation of the department, characteristics of students, how it weighs admissions criteria, the number of applications and acceptances, and financial assistance offered.

After reading a school's profile in *Graduate Study in Psychology*, you should obtain and read the school's catalogue. In addition, visiting the school and speaking to current students and faculty members should provide you with information on the following variables that you should consider when selecting programs.

1. Does the theoretical orientation of the school match your own theoretical interests? For example, is it behavioral? cognitive? psychodynamic?

2. Is the location and quality of life appealing?

3. Do the current research interests of faculty match your own?

4. What is the funding situation?

5. Does the program's balance on the research/clinical dimension match your own interests?

6. What is the quality of the research facilities and laboratories?

7. What is the quality of the clinical facilities? Where do you see patients? Where are the clinical supervisors?

**WHAT SHOULD I MAJOR IN?**

While many programs do not require an undergraduate psychology major, they require the completion of a number of psychology courses. Majoring in psychology or human development is an easy way to complete the coursework that is required for admission. Check graduate programs that interest you for specific requirements.
WHAT COURSES SHOULD I TAKE?
Different programs will have different requirements, and you need to check the specific requirements of programs that interest you. It is generally recommended that you take courses in the following seven areas:

1. Statistics
2. Additional and higher level courses in Statistics such as Experimental Methods or Research Design
3. Abnormal Psychology
4. Personality
5. Developmental Psychology or Child Development
6. Cognitive Psychology
7. Social Psychology

See the list of recommended Cornell courses included in this booklet. Some programs will require courses in additional areas of psychology, for example, cognition/learning or developmental psychology.

HOW DIFFICULT IS IT TO GAIN ADMISSION?
Admission to clinical psychology programs is highly competitive. Individual programs typically accept fewer than a dozen applicants each year. According to a recent national study, 10% of applicants to APA-accredited clinical psychology programs were admitted. The acceptance rate for Cornell students may be somewhat higher. The attached description of admission factors provides more detailed information on selection criteria. Generally, Ph.D. programs in counseling psychology and Psy.D. programs have less competitive admissions standards. Admission to master's degree programs in social work and school psychology is also less competitive.

IF I HAVE ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS WHERE CAN I GO?
The Arts & Sciences Career Library and Human Ecology Career Development Center have a number of resources which provide extensive information on clinical psychology and related fields. See the list at the end of this booklet.

Faculty with relevant background and interests in the Departments of Psychology and Human Development can provide information on the reputation of programs, trends in the field, and the application process.

Arts and Sciences students can see the advisor at Arts and Sciences Career Services, 55 Goldwin Smith Hall.

Human Ecology students can see the advisor at Human Ecology Career Development, 172 Martha Van Rensselaer Hall.

You can arrange informational interviews with professionals in career fields that interest you to ask questions about the field and graduate education in the field. The Cornell Career Services Career Guide provides suggestions for conducting these informational interviews. In addition, you can ask career-related questions of Cornell alumni through the Career Contact Network on the Cornell Career Services Web site at www.career.cornell.edu

You can also learn what it’s like to work in a particular field through two job shadowing programs:
**FRESH Program**: For first-year students! Get an insider’s view of a career field by shadowing Cornell alumni in their workplaces during spring break.
Extern Program: Sophomores, juniors and seniors may spend one day to one week over winter break shadowing an alum in a career field of their choice. Hundreds of opportunities are listed on career.cornell.edu in mid September. Applications are due in early October.

Admission Factors for Clinical Psychology

WHAT ARE SCHOOLS LOOKING FOR?
It is difficult to state definitively the factors that will determine your admission to a graduate program in clinical psychology. Each program has its own admissions standards and requirements. These variables make it difficult to define one set of standards that apply to all programs. However, almost all consider the factors cited below in looking at potential entrants.

Objective Criteria
• GPA (overall GPA, psychology GPA, and last-2-years GPA)
• Standardized test scores (GRE-V, GRE-Q, GRE-Analytical, and GRE-Psychology; MAT)
• Coursework (number of hours, subject area, and level)

Nonobjective Criteria
• Letters of recommendation
• Experience
  • Research experience
  • Clinically-related public service
• Application essays
• Interview performance
• Extracurricular activities

GPA
The average minimum GPA that most programs look for is 3.2. However, the way in which GPAs are rated varies from program to program. Some will have lower or higher required GPAs, others will look more closely at the last two years' GPA, and still others will also look at the GPA you received in psychology courses. You need to consult individual program descriptions in Graduate Study in Psychology to determine the required and preferred minimums for each program. Program committees are also aware that a certain GPA is more difficult to obtain at some schools than others.

GRE Scores
About 90% of clinical psychology programs require you to take the GRE General and Psychology Subject tests. The average minimum score required for serious consideration for clinical psychology is 600 for any one component of the GRE general test. Consult individual programs for their acceptance rates based on GRE scores. The general test should be taken at the end of your junior year or early in your senior year.

You should prepare to take the GRE Psychology Subject test by studying a good introductory psychology textbook. The average minimum score required on the Subject test is 650. Take this test in the fall of your senior year.

A few programs use MAT scores as part of the admissions process. The average minimum MAT score required is 70.

Many programs use test scores in conjunction with GPAs as an initial screening criterion.

Coursework
Individual programs vary a great deal when it comes to undergraduate psychology course requirements and preferences. Refer to Graduate Study in Psychology for admissions requirements specific to individual programs.
While it is difficult to generalize, many graduate psychology programs are more interested in generalists than specialists; graduate programs are considered the appropriate place to specialize. Therefore, a broad undergraduate education is often considered to be the best possible preparation. This means, in addition to psychology, your coursework should cover a range of disciplines including physical and biological sciences, math, English literature and composition, history, philosophy, sociology and anthropology, and a foreign language. Increasingly, programs are strongly preferring (if not requiring) at least one course in computer science.

Laboratory-based natural or biological science courses taken from departments other than psychology can nicely complement your training in psychological methods and theory.

Programs tend to be biased toward math and science courses, because taking these courses conveys a certain willingness and ability on your part to engage in scientific pursuits. Research experience is highly regarded; therefore it is to your advantage to take lab-based classes and courses with professors who are currently engaged in research with which you might be able to assist.

A listing of suggested Cornell University courses is included on page 9 in this booklet.

Letters of Recommendation
You will need to obtain an average of 3 letters of recommendation for applying to most graduate programs. Letters of recommendation are often considered to be the most important nonobjective criterion. Ideally, recommendations should be from faculty who know you well enough to provide specific information about your potential to succeed in graduate school and in a career in clinical psychology. You can get to know faculty through independent studies, research, seminars and/or informal meetings. At least two of your letters should be from faculty. The third could come from a supervisor of a clinically related public service activity, especially if he/she has a Ph.D. or M.D.

Experience
Research Experience
In general, research experience is valued most highly by clinical psychology programs. The quality of the research experience is much more important than the content area. You should be intimately involved in the design and implementation of the research. In addition to psychology, research in fields such as biology, nutrition, or sociology can be appropriate.

Clinically-related Public Service
Other psychology-related work experiences, paid or volunteer, are viewed positively and can help you assess your suitability for a clinical career. Clinically related public service includes the provision of most human services that are related to mental health.

Programs do make distinctions among specific kinds of experiences and evaluate them differently, depending on the type of program and its particular orientation. Review Graduate Study in Psychology for specific criteria for each program you are considering. If you must decide between types of psychology-related work experiences, it is to your advantage to select research because of the high value placed on research by clinical psychology programs. Participating in research is also a valuable method for investigating the field and perhaps developing a mentoring relationship with a faculty member.

Application Essays
Essays are taken quite seriously in evaluating applications. They allow you to elaborate on your unique qualifications and are evidence of your preparation for graduate study, thoughtfulness, writing ability, and appropriate creativity. The most typical themes targeted by these essays are your long-term career plans; your areas of interest in psychology; your research, practice-
based, and teaching experiences; and your reasons for choosing a particular program. It may be helpful to have your statement reviewed by your advisor or another faculty member.

**Interview Performance**

Many programs request interviews. If you are asked to appear for an interview, chances are that you are among the pool of applicants being seriously considered for admission. The interviewer will be interested in assessing how well you seem to fit into the program to which you are applying. You should thoroughly acquaint yourself with the program's training model, areas of concentration, and philosophy; have some familiarity with faculty members and their particular areas of interest; and be able to show how your interests and qualifications fit the program. The interview provides an opportunity for them to assess your personal characteristics. Individual faculty may be viewing a candidate with an eye to whether you might be interested in working in his/her particular area of research.

**Extracurricular Activities**

These are not as critical as they were when applying to an undergraduate program. Membership in psychology-related organizations can be helpful. For a list of organizations, refer to the resources section of *Getting In: A Step by Step Plan for Gaining Admission to Graduate School in Psychology*.

**WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I DON'T GET IN THE FIRST TIME?**

As we have noted, admission to clinical psychology programs is extremely competitive. It is therefore important for you to have a back-up plan in the event you are denied admission the first time around.

You have several alternatives:

- apply to other graduate psychology programs for the same school year
- reapply to the same programs or apply to other graduate psychology programs for the following school year, or reapply in a few years, after gaining additional experiences
- consider alternatives to a graduate degree in psychology

You should first assess your credentials against the admissions requirements of the specific program where you were denied admission and determine whether you set your sights too high. If, in fact, your credentials were very good, it is possible that the competition for this year or for the programs you chose was exceptionally intense.

You could examine programs that have late application dates and apply to those programs after you've been denied at your original schools. The APA Education Directorate compiles a list each spring of programs that have openings after April 15. The list is available May 15. You may contact the APA at 800-374-2721 to receive the list, or view the list online at www.apa.org/ed.

If you decide to wait and reapply for the following or later school years, you should first determine whether you should reapply to programs where you were chosen as an alternate but didn't get in, or to programs where you were denied. Programs where you were chosen as an alternate are good bets because they expressed interest in your qualifications. For schools that firmly rejected you, contact them to see if they'd consider another application from you. Try to determine what is needed to strengthen your candidacy and be sure to demonstrate additional qualifications that you may have acquired in the period between applications.

Prior to reapplication - whether to the same programs or to others - you should be sure to evaluate your credentials against program admission requirements and be sure you're selecting schools that appropriately match your qualifications. The period between applications should be used to improve your qualifications to increase your chances for acceptance. You should consider taking or retaking courses, retaking tests, or obtaining some solid research or clinical experience.
Cornell Undergraduate Courses Recommended to Prepare for Graduate Study in Clinical Psychology

It is important that you develop a solid foundation in basic psychology and supplement that with additional coursework in a specific topic/subject depending on interest. It is recommended that you complete coursework in each of seven areas: statistics, experimental methods, biological bases of behavior, personality, psychopathology, social groups, and cultural influences on development. Cornell University courses recommended for application to clinical psychology programs are listed below. To assist you in building the recommended level of knowledge, where possible, we've delineated which courses could serve as the basic foundation in a particular area and which courses would provide additional study.

It should be noted that the list below provides courses from which students can select. It is not necessary to complete them all, as long as you have selected courses from each of the seven primary areas. However, because many graduate programs have specific course requirements, you should be sure to consult the particular program requirements listed in Graduate Study in Psychology.

**Statistics**

**[Basic]**
- AEM 2100 Introductory Statistics
- BTRY 3010 Biological Statistics I
- ILRST 2100 Introductory Statistics
- ILRST 2120 Statistical Reasoning
- MATH 1710 Statistical Theory and Application in the Real World
- PAM 2100 Introduction to Statistics
- PSYCH 3500 Statistics and Research Design
- SOC 3010 Evaluating Statistical Evidence

HD strongly recommends that students who plan to complete the HD Honors Program requirements take either PSYCH 3500 or PAM 2100. The HD Honors Program also requires a second semester of statistics. These recommendations for the HD Honors Program are also recommended for students who plan to pursue a Ph.D. in clinical psychology.

**Experimental Methods**
- HD 3820: Research Methods in Human Development
- PSYCH 4910: Research Methods in Psychology

**Biological Bases of Behavior**
- HD 2200: The Human Brain and Mind: Biological Issues in Human Development
- HD 3200: Human Developmental Neuropsychology
- HD 3660: Emotional Functions of the Brain
- PSYCH 3320/BIONB 3280: Biopsychology of Learning and Memory
- HD 3440: Infant Behavior and Development
- HD/B&SOC/NS 3470: Human Growth and Development: Biological and Behavioral Interactions
- PSYCH 3610/NS 3610: Biopsychology of Normal and Abnormal Behavior
- HD 4660: Psychobiology of Temperament and Personality
- PSYCH 4220: Developmental Biopsychology
PSYCH 4250: Cognitive Neuroscience
HD 4330: Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience
HD 4740: Autism and the Development of Social Cognition
HD 4780: Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder in Children

Personality
[Basic]
HD 2600/PSYCH 2750: Introduction to Personality

[Additional]
HD 4660: Psychobiology of Temperament and Personality
PSYCH 4890: Beliefs, Attitudes and Ideologies

Psychopathology
[Basic]
HD 3530: Risk and Opportunity Factors in Childhood and Adolescence

[Additional]
HD/PSYCH 3130: Problematic Behavior in Adolescence
HD/PSYCH 3270/3280: Field Practicum I & II
HD 3700/PSYCH 3250: Adult Psychopathology
HD 3710: Child Development and Psychopathology

Social Groups
PSYCH 2800: Introduction to Social Psychology
PSYCH 4810: Advanced Social Psychology

Cultural Influences on Development
HD 4520: Culture and Human Development
HD 4580: Parent-Child Development in African-American Families
Resources For Careers in Clinical & Counseling Psychology

All book and audio/video resources are available at Arts and Sciences Career Service and Human Ecology Career Development Center unless otherwise noted.

WEB SITES

www.careercc.com/careerexp.shtml
Information on counseling, psychology, and social work.

www.apa.org
Information on the American Psychological Association, its services, and related resources.

INVESTIGATING GRADUATE SCHOOL

Assistance in examining whether a graduate degree in psychology is the right choice for you; how to select programs; and how to apply. Included in the appendix: Timetable; State & Provincial Boards and Agencies for the Statutory Licensure or Certification of Psychologists; Sample recommendation form; and The Minority Fellowship Program.

Descriptions of APA-approved graduate programs by state.

How to prepare in advance; apply to the right programs; master the interview; and make the final decision.

An overview of the pursuit of graduate study in psychology and related fields including details about the application process and what to do once you’ve applied. (Available in 55 Goldwin Smith only)

Commonly asked questions with answers on choosing a program, taking the GRE, applying, interviewing, and much more. Included in the appendix: timetable, vitae outline, sample letters of intent, areas of psychology, and ranking information. (Available in 55 Goldwin Smith only)

INVESTIGATING CAREERS

12
Focuses on career fields in psychology from academic careers and clinical practice to organizational psychology and consumer psychology. (Available in 55 Goldwin Smith only)

Includes general job search information and specific careers related to various subfields in psychology.

Information on the job search and possible career paths.

Provides general information on choosing the major, exploring careers, graduate school and the job search.

Discusses the fields of psychology; prospects; education and training; and scientific and professional organizations in psychology.

Describes social work settings; breakdown of jobs; qualifications and training; and expectations in the field. (Available in 103 Barnes only)

Describes various careers possibilities for psychology majors and provides several detailed profiles of real people, their jobs and how they found them.