

Chapter 2: Becoming a Clinical Psychologist

Chapter Objectives

After this chapter, students should be able to:

1. Demonstrate understanding of the process of applying for graduate school.
2. Demonstrate understanding of how to start a career after completion of graduate school.
3. Demonstrate understanding of how to enjoy a lifelong career in clinical psychology.

Chapter at a Glance

Considerations for Career Planning

Concrete Planning Steps

Maximizing Your Academic Preparation and Building the Best Possible Application Package

Application Forms

Grade-Point Averages

Graduate Record Examination

The Statement of Interest

Letters of Reference

Research or Clinical Experience?

Timing Issues

Getting the Most Out of Graduate School

Postdoctoral Training

Getting Licensed

Conclusion

Ongoing Considerations

Key Terms

Analytical section

Graduate record examination (GRE)

PhD

Psychoanalyst

PsyD

Quantitative section

Verbal section

Lecture Outline

Becoming a Clinical Psychologist

- I. Considerations for Career Planning
 - A. Job availability – in what area is there the most work to be found? If there is a specialty field in which you are interested in, are there jobs?
 - B. Are you competitive? What are your GRE and GPA? Have you interned in a field-related area?
 - C. Do you need an MA, a PsyD, or a PhD? As the latter degrees typically double the time in school, you need to know going in.
 - D. Are you interested in research or doing clinical work? If research, then a PhD would be the more appropriate degree.
- II. Concrete Planning Steps
 - A. Do you like to work alone or with others? If alone, private practice may be a good fit.
 - B. Do you want to work long hours or do you plan on starting a family and working fewer hours? This would affect the type of career you choose.
 - C. Are you able to move far away for the right program?
- III. Maximizing Your Academic Preparation and Building the Best Possible Application Package
 - A. Generally, you are required to turn in an application form, an official transcript, GRE scores (sometimes including the psychology subject test), at least three letters of recommendation, and a statement of interest
 - B. Grade-Point Averages: protect your GPA! Schools do look at them and the more competitive the program, the higher that number should be.
- IV. Graduate Record Examination (GRE)
 - A. The GRE is divided into several tests that measure quantitative ability, verbal ability, and analytical skills (also known as the written test).
 - 1. Verbal section: assesses the candidate's vocabulary, comprehension, and overall grasp of the language
 - 2. Quantitative section: assesses mathematical ability and comprises test questions on mathematical materials
 - 3. Analytical section: used to be multiple choice and items similar to the LSAT but in the early 2000s the multiple-choice format was replaced by an essay, which is graded on a 0–6 scale.
 - 4. Subject test: a multiple-choice test much like what you are familiar with from your undergraduate program; students who have obtained good grades in their psychology courses also tend to do well in this subject test.
 - B. The statement of interest is a two-page personal essay that highlights the development of the student's career interests, preparation for graduate

school, and outlines the student's interest in the program's specific area of psychology.

Many universities follow a mentor model where the entire admissions process is characterized by a gradual matching of student interests to those of a particular faculty member who will then agree to be a mentor to this incoming student. For this reason, it is good to investigate the faculty and see if there is someone specific that may be a good match.

- C. Letters of reference are required, typically three of them. Ask faculty in advance and make sure they are willing to write a 'good' letter of recommendation for you.
 - D. Research or clinical experience? Having experience in both is ideal. That way the department can feel confident that you are making informed decisions.
 - E. Timing issues and the interview process can be critical to getting into a program. Unfortunately, that may mean that you need to be available to interview on short notice during the months of February and March.
 - F. Getting the most out of graduate school depends on putting in the hours and, often, on a good fit with your mentor. Also, many students go from large classes to very small seminars, so if you do not do your work or come to class it is apparent.
 - G. Postdoctoral training in non-clinical areas often involves work to increase a student's publication volume and to acquire specialty skills. The degree to which supervised postdoctoral training is necessary for licensure varies from one state or province to another, and candidates need to carefully study and compare these differences.
 - H. Getting Licensed – although the requirements vary from state to state, the government has put licensing requirements in place to protect the public from harm that may arise from incompetent or unethical practice. It is wise to look at specific schools' performance on licensing exams. The average performance of all doctoral level test-takers in all jurisdictions of the Association of State Professional Psychology Boards was 67.4%, whereas the top performing program reached as high as an 84% correct rate. The overall averaged success rate for all Canadian doctoral graduates in clinical psychology programs was 80%.
- V. Ongoing Considerations
- A. Although there may be some disagreement in the field about how much weight to put on the various components, programs still use each to make admissions decisions.

Lecture Launchers

Research or Practice?

On the issue of research versus practice, it is good to discuss the role of each. If possible, have someone from the department or a friend who is in the field come and speak to your class. If you are a researcher, then try to find someone who works on the practical side to come and discuss their job and graduate school experience with the class. If you are a practitioner, see if you can get a friend or colleague that does research to come and speak to the class about what they do and what their graduate school experience was like. This allows student the chance to ask questions and perhaps get a better feel for what they may be better suited.

Preparing for the GRE

Students are often interested in whether they should study for the GRE. Many students taking the GRE will have scores falling between the 50th percentile and the relative safety of a >80% score, and they will need to make a decision on whether they want to spend the time and money to prepare better and then retake the test. This decision should be based on a realistic assessment of what happened when they took the GRE the first time. If a student had been foggy-headed because of a party the night before or recovering from a nasty flu, then his performance may have underestimated his true ability. If, however, a student has the perception she they did as well as she could, then she might decide to just let it be. Your university may offer free or inexpensive prep classes for the GRE; if so, you can direct students to a website that has that information.

Class Activities

Assign students to groups and have them perform research on the predicative validity of the GREs in terms of predicting graduate school success. Students can then present their results to the class.

Have students write a brief synopsis of the licensing requirements for different states. Discuss in class how those requirements vary and if test scores are reciprocal.

Place students into groups and have them debate if the GRE should be used as part of the admissions process.