



BECOMING A CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST

A MODERN HEALTH PROFESSION

by

Wolfgang Linden and Paul L. Hewitt

Considerations for Career Planning

When planning for their careers, future clinical psychologists must consider

- the specialty field that will have jobs available when they graduate
- what type of degree they will pursue (PsyD or PhD)
- the competition for spots in psychology programs and available financial assistance

Clinical Psychology Program Statistics

TABLE 2.1 Comparisons among APA-Accredited PsyD, Practice-Oriented PhD, and Research-Oriented PhD Programs in Clinical Psychology

Variable	APA-ACCREDITED PSYD PROGRAMS		PRACTICE-ORIENTED AND EQUAL-EMPHASIS PhD PROGRAMS		RESEARCH-ORIENTED PhD PROGRAMS		F
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Admission statistics							
No. of applications	149.7	81.1	133.7	83.5	168.5	87.4	3.2*
No. of acceptances	57.4 ^a	39.1	18.5	19.6	14.1	10.8	54.1**
% accepted	41.3 ⁿ	19.8	16.8 ^a	13.9	11.3 ^a	10.3	66.2**
No. enrolled	33.1 ^a	20.8	9.9	702	8.6	9.3	64.2**
% enrolled	59.3	13.5	62.7	19.3	60.0	17.2	0.7
Theoretical orientation							
Psychodynamic/ psychoanalytic (%)	29.4	17.7	29.6	23.1	12.0 ^a	12.5	23.0**
Radical behavioral (%)	7.6	8.4	8.1	11.5	11.1	15.7	1.4
Systems (%)	18.9	10.2	20.6	17.8	14.5	15.9	3.1
Humanistic/ phenomenological (%)	11.2	8.4	11.7	49.0 ^a	25.0	64.4 ^a	20.7
Cognitive-behavioral (%)	32.8 ^a	17.9	49.0 ⁿ	25.0	64.4 ^a	20.7	30.2**

Clinical Psychology Program Statistics (cont'd)

TABLE 2.1 Comparisons among APA-Accredited PsyD, Practice-Oriented PhD, and Research-Oriented PhD Programs in Clinical Psychology

Variable	APA-ACCREDITED PsyD PROGRAMS		PRACTICE-ORIENTED AND EQUAL-EMPHASIS PhD PROGRAMS		RESEARCH-ORIENTED PhD PROGRAMS		F
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Financial aid							
Tuition waiver only (%)	7.9	16.6	5.2	15.3	2.2	11.8	2.4
Assistantship only (%)	19.5	22.6	25.7	37.4	8.5 ^a	24.8	6.7**
Both tuition waiver and assistantship	17.5 ^a	22.6	57.2 ^a	41.7	84.2 ^a	31.6	48.0**
Student characteristics							
Women (%)	69.9	8.6	71.6	8.1	70.8	11.1	0.5
Ethnic minority (%)	20.8	16.0	19.7	13.5	18.7	10.1	0.4
Possessed master's (%)	35.2 ^a	24.8	23.8 ^a	17.1	17.2 ^a	11.7	18.5**
Students entering APA internships (%)	74.4 ^a	25.6	90.8	16.7	95.5	10.0	22.4**
Years to complete degree	5.1 ^a	0.7	6.1	0.8	6.2	0.9	27.7**

Note: Sample sizes were 40–41 for APA-accredited PsyD programs, 71–74 for practice-oriented and equal-emphasis PhD programs, and 80–85 for research-oriented PhD programs.

^aThis group differs significantly from all other groups ($p < .05$ by Newman–Keuls procedure).

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Concrete Planning Steps

Before applying to clinical psychology programs, students should ask themselves if they

- enjoy working alone or within groups
- want to pursue leadership positions
- prefer novelty or an established routine in their work
- are willing to work long hours

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Concrete Planning Steps (cont'd)

Before applying to clinical psychology programs, students should ask themselves

- if they are willing to move for a program
- how these decisions affect their partners and children

Application Forms

- Application forms should be filled out neatly and completely.
- Mention any awards and honors you received.
- Mention papers that were published in peer-reviewed journals and those that are being considered for publication.

Grade Point Average (GPA)

- Grades are usually reported as letter grades or percentages.
- Percentage grades are less ambiguous than letter grades.
- A student that does not have at least a 3.5 GPA will probably not be admitted into a prestigious clinical or counseling psychology program.

Graduate Record Examination (GRE)

- A strong score on the GRE may make up for a weak grade point average.
- Students with GRE scores in less than the 50th percentile are unlikely to be admitted into a graduate program.

Graduate Record Examination (GRE)

- The GRE includes
 - a verbal section that assesses the candidate's vocabulary, comprehension, and overall grasp of language
 - a quantitative section that tests mathematical ability
 - an analytical section with an essay question

Graduate Record Examination (GRE) (cont'd)

- The GRE includes
 - a subject test covering the topics taught in undergraduate psychology courses

The Statement of Interest

- Students are expected to write a personalized essay with each application.
- A good length for a statement of interest is two pages.
- Don't be too broad or too narrow when writing about interests.

The Statement of Interest

Applicants should outline

- how they developed their career interests
- how they prepared for graduate school
- what clinical topics excite them

Letters of Reference

- Letters of reference give readers the opportunity to learn something about students that can't be found on a transcript or from GRE scores.
- Students should get letters of recommendation from professors that they worked with outside of the classroom.

Letters of Reference

- Students should provide everything that professors need—instructions, prestamped envelopes, addresses—to make it easy for them to send the recommendations.

Research or Clinical Experience?

- Any clinical or research experience helps students demonstrate their initiative and learn useful skills.
- Research-oriented programs favor research experience and practitioner-oriented programs favor clinical experience.

Timing

- Application deadlines in North America are generally December or January, with admissions offers going out to candidates no later than April 1.
- It's a good idea for students to participate in an in-person or phone interview with a faculty member.

Timing (cont'd)

- It is recommended for students to visit their top two choices and talk to current students to get a feel for the program and the campus.

Getting the Most Out of Graduate School

- Graduate school can be a hectic, but rewarding experience.
- Many students work up to 80 hours per week.
- It's important for graduate students to learn how to prioritize their time, communicate well with others, and conduct their own research.

Postdoctoral Training

- In order to prepare for academic careers, it has become standard practice to complete additional training at the postdoctoral level.
- This additional training gives students the opportunity to boost their publishing record and acquire additional skills.

Postdoctoral Training (cont'd)

- Postdoctoral work is not as common for those with clinical psychology degrees.

Getting Licensed

- North American clinical psychologists are expected to get a license so that they can practice in the field.
- This is done to protect the public from being harmed by incompetent or unethical practitioners.

Getting Licensed (cont'd)

- After becoming licensed, clinical psychologists are expected to participate in continuing education courses.

Getting Licensed

- The licensing process includes:
 - a licensing exam
 - a criminal background check
 - providing letters of recommendation, transcripts, and details of practical experience