Advisor’s Guide to Doctoral Programs in Clinical & Counseling Psychology

This manual is suited primarily for students interested in Doctoral programs. When in doubt, always refer to the Insider’s Guide to Graduate Programs in Clinical and Counseling Psychology as it is an excellent resource and the best substitute for information when a counseling grad student is not available for direct consultation.

SERIOUSLY, THIS BOOK HAS IT ALL.

What is the difference between Clinical and Counseling Psychology?
Good question. There are more similarities than differences. Graduates of both types of program are eligible for the same professional benefits (i.e. licensure, independent practice, insurance reimbursement, academic positions) and receive similar programs of training (i.e. 4 years of research/clinical training and coursework followed by 1 year of internship). Differences include:

- Clinical is larger than Counseling (~2600 [1300 Ph.D. and 1300 Psy.D.] doctoral degrees conferred annually v. ~400).
- Clinical programs are housed typically in Psychology Departments whereas Counseling programs can be found in Colleges of Education (though there are always exceptions).
- Clinical programs may be more likely to have a focus on projective and intelligence assessment and Counseling programs may have a focus more on career and vocational assessment.
- Clinical programs tend to train toward a behavioral or psychodynamic therapy orientation where Counseling programs endorse more client-centered/Rogerian approaches.
- About 15% more clinical psychologists are employed in private practice than counseling psychologists and about 10% more counseling psychologists are employed in college counseling centers than clinical psychologists.

What is the difference between a Ph.D. and a Psy.D.?
Ph.D. programs are typically either Boulder-model or Clinical Science model programs.

- Boulder-model or scientist-practitioner programs place an emphasis on both research (competent understanding, application, and generation of research) and clinical training (practicum, psychotherapy).
- Clinical Science models place a much heavier emphasis on research than clinical training, though still provides both to students.

Psy.D. programs are typically Vail-model (or practitioner-scholar) programs.

- Vail models place a heavier emphasis on clinical training and tend to encourage scholarly understanding of and competent use of research over active research generation.
Is a Master’s Degree required for admission to a Doctoral Program?

Typically not. Most Doctoral programs in these fields will provide the opportunity to earn an M.A. en route to the Ph.D. There are a limited number of programs/mentors that may state a preference for M.A. level applicants but it won’t be super common.

If a Doctorate is your end goal, you might consider obtaining a Master’s Degree before applying to Ph.D. programs if you have:

- A low GPA
- Weak GRE scores
- Scarce research/clinical experience
- Uncertain career goals
- Late applications
- Weak Letters of Recommendation
- Inadequate coursework in Psychology

A Doctorate (but instead, maybe a Master’s!) should probably not be your end goal if you:

- Have no interest in research and don’t think you could sustain involvement with research for a minimum of 4-6 years.
- Have no interest in teaching at the university level or mentoring undergraduate/graduate students.
- Have time constraints in your life that would make the ~4-6 year commitment to a doctoral program impossible.

A Short List of Pros and Cons for Master’s v. Doctoral Programs

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<tr>
<th>Pro Master’s</th>
<th>Con Master’s</th>
<th>Pro Doctoral</th>
<th>Con Doctoral</th>
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<td>2-3 year time commitment (able to join workforce faster)</td>
<td>Larger class sizes (may influence quality of training).</td>
<td>Smaller class sizes and close training.</td>
<td>4-6 year time commitment (delays entering workforce).</td>
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<td>Several program types (M.S.W., L.M.H.C, M.F.T., etc.)</td>
<td>Less funding (more loans/debt).</td>
<td>Reputable programs offer funding (tuition remission, assistantships/fellowships, etc.) often for duration of study.</td>
<td>Very competitive application process (~10% of applicants accepted).</td>
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<td>Many clinical/service settings available.</td>
<td>Lower salary range.</td>
<td>Higher salary range.</td>
<td>More requirements to complete (Quals, Internship, Dissertation, etc.).</td>
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<td>Less competitive application process.</td>
<td>More M.A.-level clinicians in the workforce.</td>
<td>A variety of settings (clinical, academic, consulting, supervision, etc.) available.</td>
<td>Fewer Doctorates in the workforce but often also fewer positions.</td>
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What are programs looking for (i.e. what do I need to prepare)?

General requirements programs will typically include the following:

- Strong GPA (~3.5+ is competitive).
- Strong GRE scores (~1200+ combined verbal and quantitative on the OLD scale is competitive).
- Strong recommendations from Instructors/Mentors/Supervisors in the field.
- A strong Curriculum Vita (i.e. CV or academic resume) composed of:
  - Research experience and initiative to conduct or lead your own research.
  - Clinically relevant work/volunteer experiences.
- A written statement passionately relating your PROFESSIONAL research/clinical experiences that demonstrate strong “fit” with interests shared by you and the program/potential mentor.

Note that Doctoral Programs will emphasize research experience over clinical experience and Master’s Programs will often not require research experience and thus emphasize clinical experience. Master’s programs will also often not require the same amount of “fit” due to lack of mentorship model.

The Application Process in a Nutshell

1. Decide what your career goals and interests are through gaining research/clinical experience.

2. Decide which programs fit these goals and interests (M.A., Ph.D., clinical, counseling, both?).

3. Take GRE, identify recommenders, update CV.

4. Locate 8-15 programs that fit well with your experiences, interests, and the level of competitiveness of your GPA/GRE scores/experience.

5. Contact faculty or program representatives to get more information, inquire about whether accepting new students, and/or begin a conversation about mutual areas of professional interest.

6. Assemble your applications for each program including all the listed admissions requirements and submit by deadlines.
### The Acceptance Process in a Nutshell

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<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Most graduate programs will go through an initial selection process that begins with meeting minimum objective criteria for GRE scores and GPA.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>The subjective material in CVs, statements of purpose, and letters of recommendation are reviewed for fit with the program and (in mentor models) fit with a faculty mentor.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>To applicants are contacted for interviews (invited to an interview day and/or interviewed via phone/Skype) where BOTH faculty and applicants have the opportunity to further determine goodness of fit and interest in working with one another.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Decisions are made and sent out following the interview (time frames will vary throughout this whole process so patience is a useful trait). You will either be denied, waitlisted, or accepted!</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Final decisions. You will have to decide what to do with the offers, waitlists, or denials you’ve received.</td>
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### Notes for Statements of Purpose
- Tailor for each program/mentor to demonstrate fit. Make sure you mention research ideas and (related) interests of your own.
- Follow a Past/Present/Future format.
- Keep things succinct and actively written (avoid passive voice and flowery language). More than 2 pages is unnecessary. The shorter and to the point it is, the easier to read and more likely to be read.
- Do not repeat your CV. Elaborate on what they already can see.
- KEEP THINGS PROFESSIONAL. If you reference something from your personal life it should be brief and have a direct connection to a professional experience or opportunity. *Do not discuss personal therapy or mental health history.* The reason for this is NOT because that experience is unimportant. It is because it’s not unique (everyone has this kind of history and personal influence) and it is not professional.

### Things You Need to Look Out for in Programs
- **APA or CPA accreditation.** Your program should have this!
- **APPIC or APA Internship match rate.** HIGHER IS BETTER. You want a program with consistent and high match. Do not risk attending a program that cannot match the overwhelming majority of their students.
- **Number of incoming students.** Generally speaking, be wary of programs that accept more than about 10 new students each year. Chances are funding and direct training will be less available.
- **Consistent and competitive funding.** Programs that can provide tuition remission, stipends, assistantships, etc. for the duration of your training are reputable and preferred. Consider differences in funding across programs in the context of their location as well (i.e. San Francisco is WAY more expensive than Gainesville thus a $20K stipend with tuition remission will go farther in one location than in the other).