

# PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Students interested exclusively in becoming research, scientific or experimental psychologists (even in the field of clinical psychology), and not practitioners, should consult the information handout titled, “Graduate Study in Humanities and Social Science,” available in the Professional and Graduate School Opportunities office of the Career Services Center (CSC). This and other handouts on “Social Work” and other “Mental Health” (<http://career.ucsd.edu/L3/sa/PMentalHealth.shtml>) professional programs are also available on our website at <http://career.ucsd.edu>.

## TYPES OF PROGRAMS

Professional psychologists are those who are engaged in independent and unsupervised psychotherapy practice and must be licensed or certified by a state board of examiners. They typically must complete a doctoral program (Ph.D., Psy.D., or Ed.D.) in clinical or counseling psychology. Master’s level training is generally not sufficient to prepare for work as a professional psychologist; this is true in California. A Master’s degree in psychology may be sufficient for other careers (e.g., CA public school psychology) or might be helpful to strengthen a weaker undergraduate academic record in preparation for a doctoral program.

Doctoral programs are usually four to six years in length and include courses in the behavioral (and occasionally the natural) sciences, statistics, ethics and research methodology, a comprehensive or qualifying examination, as well as clinical practicum and extensive research culminating in a doctoral dissertation. These programs are then followed by up to three years of clinical practice work (possibly including a post-doctoral internship year) under the supervision of a licensed professional psychologist. This practice occurs prior to a comprehensive oral and written examination and licensure. Psy.D. programs are typically at least four years in length and resemble Ph.D. programs in structure, yet put less emphasis on research and more on clinical training. Psy.D. programs exist in both clinical and counseling psychology.

## TRAINING MODELS

Professional psychology training offers two distinct program models. The **scientist-practitioner** model trains students to be qualified as “clinical scholars” who conduct basic research, as well as to use their knowledge and training to practice in clinical settings. These doctoral programs, typically in clinical psychology, exist in major research university psychology departments. Their graduates can accept research and academic positions in colleges and universities, or pursue clinical careers in a variety of settings (hospitals, governmental agencies, private practice, etc.). Admission to these programs tends to be extremely competitive, and their admissions committees prefer to accept students with research backgrounds. Examples of this model are the UCSD/SDSU joint clinical psychology program, UC Santa Barbara’s counseling psychology program, the clinical program at UCLA, and the University of Colorado, Boulder clinical program. Some scientist-practitioner programs, like UCLA’s, may place much more emphasis on research and be significantly less interested in training practitioners. Others, like the University of Washington or University of Minnesota, may be the reverse. Read the schools’ mission statements and review the programs’ content to find the program right for your interests.

The **professional training** model prepares students exclusively to become clinicians, or direct providers of psychological services, to a variety of client populations. This model trains its doctoral program graduates to be careful consumers of psychological research which can be used in applied settings, rather than for the pursuit of research activities or experiments within the field. These programs can have a clinical or counseling psychology focus, and confer Ph.D. or Psy.D. degrees, or occasionally the Ed.D. or Psy.D. granted through departments or schools of education which have professional training programs in counseling or educational psychology. Professional training programs exist mainly in stand-alone professional schools or in professional schools affiliated with universities, medical schools and theological seminaries. (The Ph.D. and Psy.D. programs at Alliant University at four campuses throughout California, the Psy.D. program in the Department of Counseling Psychology of the School of Education at the private University of San Francisco, the clinical Ph.D. program of the Fielding Institute in Santa Barbara, and the clinical Ph.D. and Psy.D. programs at Fuller Theological Seminary are examples of the professional training model.)

## PSYCHOLOGY EMPHASES

There are two primary psychology program types, clinical and counseling psychology. Although differences

between the two program types do exist, the distinctions between the two have diminished over the years. Students interested in psychology should consider both types of programs thoroughly without bias as to type before deciding where to apply. A helpful article addressing the differences between counseling and clinical psychology programs (size, admission requirements, post-graduation career options, etc.) can be found on the Psi Chi National Honor Society in Psychology's website at <http://www.psichi.org/>.

In short, though, **clinical psychologists** assess and treat mental, emotional and behavioral disorders. These range from short term crises, such as adolescent rebellion, to more severe, chronic conditions such as schizophrenia. Some treat specific problems exclusively, such as phobias or clinical depression. Others focus on specific populations: youth, ethnic minority groups, and the elderly, for instance. Clinical psychology programs also tend to emphasize more severe, biologically-based disorders.

**Counseling psychologists** help people accommodate to change in their lives or lifestyles. For example, they provide vocational and career assessment and guidance or help others come to terms with life events, such as loss of a loved one or divorce. They also help with developmental stage and adjustment issues like students adjusting to college life, and help others with behavioral changes, such as smoking cessation. They can also consult with other psychologists or physicians on physical problems that have underlying psychological causes.

In addition to these two main fields, professional psychologists can also train in other fields, and can work directly with clients. **Educational psychologists** focus on how effective teaching and learning occurs, often consulting with teachers and parents to accomplish their goals. **Industrial and organizational psychologists** apply psychological principles and research methods to the work place in the interest of improving productivity and the quality of work life. **Neuropsychologists** specialize in the diagnosis, assessment and treatment of patients with brain injuries or neurocognitive deficiencies. **Rehabilitation psychologists** work with stroke and accident victims, as well as those with developmental disabilities and mental retardation. **School psychologists** work directly with parents, teachers and students in public and private schools to diagnose learning and other disabilities and to design treatment plans. **Sports psychologists** help athletes focus on progress toward competitive goals, as well as deal with problems stemming from lack of motivation, anxiety or fear of failure. **Occupational health psychologists** improve the quality of work and protect and promote the safety, health and well-being of workers. **Forensic Psychologists** deal with the intersection of psychology and the legal process. Training to be a professional psychologist in some of these fields may require specialized post-doctoral work. Information for those with doctoral or Master's level training in these varied fields of psychology and career options within each can be found on the American Psychological Association (APA)'s website ([www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org)) and at [www.psichi.org](http://www.psichi.org).

## **RESEARCHING THE PROGRAMS**

Consider your area of specialization carefully, and learn as much as possible about many programs' faculty, scholarly and clinical focuses, standards for admission, and the strength of clinical supervision of its students, before you apply to a broad enough range and number of programs. *Graduate Study in Psychology*, a guide published by the APA, is the best comprehensive source of specific information about the curricula and program focuses, admission criteria and application procedures for professional and research programs in psychology, as well as program accreditation and licensure information. This volume is typically sold in the UCSD bookstore, and may be ordered from the APA via their web site ([www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org)). Reference copies are in the Career Services Center and in campus libraries. Useful links to psychology graduate program and related career sites are maintained on the Career Services Center's website under "Mental Health" (<http://career.ucsd.edu/files/menthlth.pdf>). Other useful resources available in the Career Services Center are the books, *The Complete Guide to Graduate School Admission: Psychology and Related Fields*, and *Insider's Guide to Graduate Programs in Clinical and Counseling Psychology*.

Other resources include professional and academic articles in journals like *The American Psychologist*, the *Journal of Clinical Psychology* and the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, or reference volumes such as *Biographical Directory of the APA*, *The National Faculty Directory*, and *Research Centers Directory* (all available in UCSD libraries). The Career Services Center has catalogs and program brochures, rankings of doctoral programs, videotapes on psychology and other mental health professions, information binders on *Professional Psychology*, *Marriage & Family Therapy*, and *Social Work*, and offers the opportunity to speak with participating program representatives at our Professional and Graduate School Fair each fall.

## **ADMISSION CRITERIA**

Gaining entry into graduate programs in psychology can be competitive. In some areas of study, such as scientist-practitioner clinical psychology programs, the number of applicants for doctoral programs far exceeds the positions available. These clinical programs generally accept only about 6-8% of their applicants. Applicants apply directly to each program, whose deadlines range from December through February. Successful candidates are notified in the spring by faculty admission committees that very carefully screen appropriate candidates.

Though you should carefully review individual school websites for their specific admission requirements, most programs will require the following items for application: (1) A major or significant undergraduate coursework in psychology (including courses in general psychology, statistics, research design and experimental psychology). Successful applicants also generally have strong and broad background in the biological, social and mathematical sciences. See *Graduate Study in Psychology* for specific undergraduate courses required by graduate programs. (2) Significant research experience with projects and/or independent studies. (3) Transcripts showing academic achievement, especially strong upper division grades. (4) Strong admission test scores. (5) A well-written admission essay. (6) Strong letters of recommendation. (7) An interview. (8) Clinical or community service experience. Some of these elements are discussed in detail below.

### **Research Experience**

The competitive applicant should engage in scholarly research at the undergraduate level. UCSD students can gain research experience for academic credit through independent study courses (199) in the departments of psychology or other social sciences, through the Faculty Mentor Program (<http://aep.ucsd.edu/fmp/fmp.asp>), or through the undergraduate research office (<http://ugresearch.ucsd.edu/> or <http://urp.ucsd.edu/>). Also, consider volunteering to help faculty with research projects, sign up for Academic Internship research credit, or obtain a research job or volunteer position off-campus in organizations such as the Veteran's Administration Hospital. Related campus and off-campus jobs and internships can sometimes be found in Port Triton on the Career Services Center's website at <http://career.ucsd.edu>.

### **Admission Tests**

Most psychology graduate programs require the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) General Test, a test of verbal, quantitative and analytical writing. Some programs also require the GRE Subject Test in Psychology, and/or the Miller Analogies Test (MAT), a one-hour test of analogies (see [www.gre.org](http://www.gre.org) and [www.milleranalogies.com](http://www.milleranalogies.com) for details and preparation information). Applicants should take these tests in time for scores to be received by the program application deadlines. This means taking the tests no later than October or November of the year before you want to enter a program. Preparation for these tests is important, as scores are carefully used by committees in making admissions decisions. Test preparation books are available at the tests' websites, in the UCSD Bookstore, and at other booksellers. A handout on "[Admission Test Preparation](http://career.ucsd.edu)" is offered at <http://career.ucsd.edu>.

Careful review for the GRE Subject Test in Psychology is advised. The content of that exam is: 40% experimental or natural science oriented (questions from learning, language, memory, thinking, perception, ethology, comparative psychology, sensation and physiological psychology); 43% social or social science oriented (from clinical and abnormal, developmental, personality and social psychology); and 17% general (from the history of psychology, applied psychology, measurement, research design and statistics).

### **Application Essays**

For **scientist-practitioner** model programs, the Career Services Center website offers a handout on writing your statement of intent at <http://career.ucsd.edu/files/statmentofintent.pdf>. This essay should detail your background and the specific research experiences that have prepared you for graduate study, as well as discuss your future research emphases. As directed on each application, include detailed information about your research experience, including experimental design, data collection methods, and statistical or other treatment of the data. If appropriate, reveal findings and relevance to further research. Clinical or community service experience may not be as critical for these research-based degree programs.

If you are applying to **professional training** model programs, see our handout

(<http://career.ucsd.edu/files/personalstmt1.pdf>) for suggestions on writing your personal statement. You should discuss how your background and experience have prepared you for this program and your future career. Highlighting your clinical or community service experience is helpful when applying to professional programs in clinical or counseling psychology that train students exclusively for work as a practitioner. These programs will also value evidence of your research background and potential.

Bring in a typed, double-spaced draft of your application to the Career Services Center for a critique. We'll provide you with comments within seven working days.

### **Letters of Reference**

Most psychology programs require at least three letters from faculty and researchers who are familiar with your academic and research background, as well as your potential to succeed in graduate study and research. Professional training models may value letters from clinical or community service supervisors. Letters are a very important component in the applicant process, so choose your references carefully. Letters may be solicited from faculty or researchers working in more than one department or research institute. In-depth, specific, evaluative letters are the most helpful. The Career Services Center offers a "Guide to Obtaining Letters of Recommendation" at <http://career.ucsd.edu/files/guidltr.pdf>.

### **Interviews**

Most clinical and counseling psychology doctoral programs conduct on-site interviews with the applicants who are most qualified for admission. Interviewees are usually expected to pay for travel to interviews, which typically occur in the winter. However, extremely strong applicants may be provided with some compensation. Tools are available on our website at <http://career.ucsd.edu/undergraduates/thinking-about-grad-school/application-basics.html#interviewing> to prepare you for interviews. These include: interviewing workshops in the fall and winter quarters, an information handout and checklist for the interview process, a video on interviewing for clinical psychology programs, and Interview Stream – a web-based, on-camera interview practice tool.

### **Clinical or Community Service Experience**

Professional training model programs and some scientist-practitioner model programs will also value clinical or community service experience that demonstrates your ability to communicate with, work with and help others. UCSD Counseling and Psychology Services (<http://psychservices.ucsd.edu>) operates a peer mentor program where you could gain counseling experience. You can also find opportunities in your community through [www.VolunteerMatch.org](http://www.VolunteerMatch.org) and [www.VolunteerSanDiego.org](http://www.VolunteerSanDiego.org) to gain interpersonal skills like listening and communication, and demonstrate an interest in working with others.

### **FINANCIAL AID**

The amount of financial aid available to pay for school differs among type and caliber of program. Scientist-practitioner doctoral programs generally provide teaching and research assistant stipends and some tuition assistance. Professional training programs may provide some aid, but most of their students seek other sources of funding, primarily loans. The Career Services Center website offers handouts and links to information on Financial Aid and Fellowships at <http://career.ucsd.edu/undergraduates/thinking-about-grad-school/financial-aid-and-fellowships.html>.

### **CAREER INFORMATION**

Data on employment, education and demographics for psychologists can be found at <http://research.apa.org>. The Career Services Center library has information and videotapes about psychology and related mental health careers. Also, through the Career Access Network (CAN at <http://alumni.ucsd.edu/careers/can/>), you can connect with UCSD alumni working as professional psychologists who are willing to talk to you about their careers and education. Membership in the UCSD Alumni Association is required to access CAN.

Advisors can help eligible UCSD students and alumni with their professional school application questions in one-on-one meetings. Call (858) 534-4939 to set up an appointment.