

# Clinical and Counseling Psychology

## What is Clinical Psychology?

“Clinical psychologists assess and treat mental, emotional and behavioral disorders. These range from short-term crises, such as difficulties resulting from adolescent conflicts, to more severe, chronic conditions, such as schizophrenia. Some clinical psychologists treat specific problems exclusively, such as phobias or clinical depression. Others focus on specific populations — for instance, youths; families or couples; ethnic minority groups; gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender individuals; or older people. They also consult with physicians on physical problems that have underlying psychological causes” (APA, 2011, p. 4)

## What is Counseling Psychology?

“Counseling psychologists help people recognize their strengths and resources to cope with everyday problems and serious adversity. They do counseling/ psychotherapy, teaching and scientific research with individuals of all ages, families and organizations (e.g., schools, hospitals, businesses). Counseling psychologists help people understand and take action on career and work problems, they pay attention to how problems and people differ across the lifespan, and they have great respect for the influence of differences among people (such as race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability status) on psychological well-being. They believe that behavior is affected by many things, including qualities of the individual (e.g., psychological, physical or spiritual factors) and factors in the person’s environment (e.g., family, society and cultural groups)” (APA, 2011, p. 5)

## What is the difference between Clinical and Counseling Psychology?

Historically, the differences have been more philosophical in nature. Clinical Psychologists have tended to adopt a medical model (i.e., illness) perspective on psychological problems, whereas Counseling Psychologists have tended to adopt a developmental perspective on these issues. In addition, some of the populations and settings in which Clinical and Counseling Psychologists worked differed. For example, Clinical Psychologists typically worked in hospitals, agencies, and private practice with severely mentally disturbed individuals. Counseling Psychologists typically worked in college counseling centers, schools, and private practice, dealing with more “normal” issues (e.g., career difficulties, marital/relationship problems). To be honest, nowadays there aren’t too many differences between the two areas as Clinical and Counseling Psychologists are trained similarly and end up working in similar settings and with similar populations/issues.

## How are these different from psychiatry?

Psychiatrists are medical doctors, and therefore, must attend medical school. In addition, they must receive specialized training as part of a 4-5 year residency. Because they are medical doctors, they are trained to provide medically-based treatments, such as medications, to people (although some are trained to provide psychotherapy). Clinical and Counseling Psychologists, on the other hand, are typically trained to provide psychotherapy, testing/ assessments, and conduct research. They do not go to medical school, and therefore, are not qualified to prescribe medications.

If you are interested in Psychiatry as a career, Psychology is a good undergraduate major for you; however, you will also need to take all of the Pre-medicine requirements that are required for students seeking admission to medical school.

### **How do I learn more about Clinical and Counseling Psychology?**

The best place for information on these are the websites of the Society of Clinical Psychology and the Society of Counseling Psychology:

<http://www.div12.org/education/>

<http://www.div17.org/>

### **What undergraduate courses are most helpful?**

#### **Foundation Courses:**

Abnormal Psychology  
Psychology of Personality  
Social Psychology  
Psychology of Learning  
Motivation

#### **Psychological Science Electives**

Developmental Psychopathology  
Any Developmental Course  
Interpersonal Effectiveness

#### **Free Electives (Non-Psychology Courses)**

Intro to Human Services  
Interviewing Techniques (Human Services)  
Case Management (Human Services)  
Addictive Behaviors (Human Services)  
Intro to Sociology

### **What can I do with an undergraduate degree?**

Many of the career options you might have heard of, including becoming a Clinical or Counseling Psychologist, typically requires a doctoral degree. However, individuals with an undergraduate degree who are interested in the Counseling/Clinical field with a bachelor's degree might be employed as a peer mentor, a case manager, or a residential counselor.

### **What about graduate school?**

#### **Doctoral Programs**

- Require at least a bachelor's degree to be admitted. Some programs recruit those with a bachelor's degree; others value those with a master's degree. Be sure to look at the program information to determine which one applies to the school you are interested in.

- Generally 4-5+ year programs
- The foundation courses listed above will provide you with a good start as to the required prerequisite courses. However, these do vary across-doctoral programs so again, be sure to research the requirements.
- Require practica and a year-long, full-time internship as part of the program
- Require a dissertation
- The location of these programs varies – many are within Psychology Departments, although some are in Education Departments

### **What can I do with a Doctoral Degree?**

- Provide counseling/psychotherapy to individuals, couples, families, and groups
- Administer psychological testing and assessments
- Teach at the college/university level
- Provide supervision of trainees
- Conduct research and program evaluations
- Work in settings such as hospitals, agencies, college counseling centers, schools, and private practice

### **What should I look for in a doctoral program?**

Generally, you should look for clinical and counseling psychology doctoral programs that are accredited by the American Psychological Association (APA). Programs that are not accredited by this organization may not provide you with the coursework you need to become a licensed psychologist. You should also look for programs that emphasize the things you are interested in. For example, some doctoral programs put more focus on training students to become researchers rather than therapists, while others put more emphasis on training clinicians. You should also look into whether or not programs have funding available to support your studies (for example, as a research or teaching assistant). Last, you should think about other things that are important to you, such as cost, location of the program, etc.

### **How do I locate doctoral programs?**

A list of APA-accredited doctoral programs across the country can be found at:

<http://apps.apa.org/accredsearch/>

### **Licensure**

To become a practicing clinical or counseling psychologist, you must become licensed. While the requirements vary from state-to-state, they are generally similar. Typically, you must have taken certain courses (this is why attending an APA-accredited program is important), received 2 years of full-time supervised experience working with clients (one of these years may be the internship that is part of your program), and pass state and national licensure exams.

## **Can I become a counselor/therapist without a doctoral degree?**

Yes. There are other fields that typically only require a master's degree. These include counseling (school, mental health, rehabilitation, and substance abuse counseling), clinical social work, and marriage & family therapy. Fitchburg State has a graduate program in Counseling (see below). For more information on these fields:

- Counseling -- <http://www.counseling.org/>; <http://www.cacrep.org/>
- Clinical Social Work -- <http://www.clinicalsocialworkassociation.org/>; <http://www.cswe.org/>
- Marriage & Family Therapy – <http://www.aamft.org>

## **Sources:**

American Psychological Association. (2011). *Careers in psychology*. Retrieved from <http://apa.org/careers/resources/guides/careers.pdf>

Norcross, J. C., & Sayette, M. A. (2012). *Insider's guide to graduate programs in Clinical and Counseling psychology* (2012/2013 edition). New York: Guilford Press.