

Careers in Psychology: Clinical Psychology

Once students have made the decision to go to graduate school, they are often confused by the large number of available programs. Individuals who want to become a therapist discover that they can obtain a degree in clinical psychology, counseling psychology, social work, or marriage and family therapy. Although these fields share some commonalities, each field focuses on a different client population.

What Is Clinical Psychology?

Clinical psychologists integrate theory and research to assess and treat distressed individuals. They work in a variety of settings to treat clients whose problems range from transient stressors to chronic, debilitating mental illnesses. In addition, many clinical psychologists conduct research to study specific treatments or to understand the causes of psychological disorders. (In contrast, counseling psychologists deal with life adjustment issues, such as the transition to college, marital problems, or work stress.) It is possible to get a master's degree in clinical psychology, but most clinical programs are geared towards earning a Ph.D. or Psy.D. (because many states do not allow masters-level clinical psychologists to practice independently). Therefore, if you do not want to get a doctoral degree, it may be best to think about earning an M.A./M.S. in counseling or an M.S.W. (Master's of Social Work).

Two types of doctoral-level degrees are offered in clinical psychology: the Ph.D. and the Psy.D. (doctorate of psychology). Ph.D. programs typically integrate research and clinical work and train students to enter academia, private practice, or research positions. Psy.D. programs were created as an alternative to Ph.D. programs for individuals who were primarily interested in clinical work rather than research. However, the Psy.D. degree may limit your ability to get research or academic positions because it is practice-focused. A typical program of study for either degree is 4 years plus a year-long internship (although many students take at least 1 more year to finish their degree requirements).

Many graduate programs (particularly those offering the Ph.D.) award tuition waivers (partial or full) and pay a small salary (called a "stipend") to students who have a graduate assistantship (i.e., a job doing research or serving as a teaching assistant) or fellowship to attend. Students apply for assistantships and fellowships when they apply for graduate school admission.

Further Information

See the following websites for additional information:

www.apa.org (The website for the American Psychological Association. Click into "Students" and "Considering a Career in Psychology?")

Graduate Study in Psychology (updated frequently). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. A list of graduate programs in all fields of psychology with information about admission requirements. Ask for it at the reference desk in the library.

www.apa.org/divisions/div12/homepage.shtml (Division 12, Society of Clinical Psychology, of the American Psychological Association)

www.bls.gov/oco for the U. S. Department of Labor's *Occupational Outlook Handbook*.