

## Careers in Psychology: Counseling

Counseling psychology is concerned with interpersonal and emotional functioning across the human lifespan. Areas of focus include the emotional, vocational, social, educational, and health-related concerns that individuals might have.

### *Job Description*

Counseling psychologists work with individuals who are experiencing academic or vocational difficulties, adjustment difficulties following a crisis, and temporary psychosocial difficulties brought about by a change in life circumstances. Counseling psychology differs from other mental health professions by emphasizing normal developmental issues and problems related to everyday social, emotional, and physical concerns. In contrast, *clinical psychologists* also deal with major mental illness.

Counseling psychologists are employed in a variety of settings including schools, universities, mental health clinics, and rehabilitation firms. Counseling psychologists pay close attention to multicultural issues and to how the environment impacts development and day-to-day living. Counseling psychologists who do psychotherapy tend to do short-term, goal focused therapy that is problem specific. For example, a counseling psychologist may work with a college student who is experiencing feelings of sadness related to being away from home for the first time. Counseling psychologists employed in organizational settings may work with employers to enhance the well being of employees, thereby improving productivity.

The differences between clinical psychologists and counseling psychologists can be subtle. Typically, clinical psychology programs focus more on research whereas counseling programs focus more on the applied practice of psychology. In addition, clinical psychologists can work with individuals who have severe mental health disorders whereas counseling psychologists work with individuals who have problems related to personal growth or changes in life circumstances. The main difference is that students with a master's degree in counseling can practice independently in many states as long as they graduated from a school accredited by The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). Clinical psychologists cannot practice independently until they have earned a doctoral degree. Therefore, in many states a master's degree in counseling may afford more freedom than a master's degree in clinical psychology.

### *Educational Requirements*

As with other graduate programs, admission into a counseling psychology program is competitive. For students applying to a Ph.D. program, equal emphasis is placed on research and volunteer experience. Consult the following web sites for more information:

[www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org) for information about various fields of psychology (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/about/division/div17.html](http://www.apa.org/about/division/div17.html) for Division 17, the division of the American Psychological Association for counseling psychologists.

[www.bls.gov/oco](http://www.bls.gov/oco) for the U. S. Department of Labor's *Occupational Outlook Handbook*.