

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY
Clinical Psychology Program Brochure
2021-2022

Overview and Purpose

The Clinical Psychology Program at The Pennsylvania State University has been continuously accredited by the [American Psychological Association](#) since the 1940s. The doctoral program is a founding member of the [Academy of Psychological Clinical Science](#), a highly selective organization of clinical science doctoral programs, and is a member of the [Child Clinical and Pediatric Psychology Training Council](#).

Our [PCASAS](#)¹ and [APA](#)² accredited **Clinical Science** program trains students in the integration of clinical science and practice that is consistent with scientific evidence. The emphasis on the term “science” underscores the commitment to empirical approaches to evaluating the validity and utility of testable hypotheses and to advancing knowledge by this method. We train graduate students to produce and disseminate cutting edge knowledge that moves the field of clinical science forward and we provide outstanding applied training in assessment and intervention that prepares students with the educational background needed to pursue subsequent professional licensure if desired. (Note that completing the program is not sufficient to become licensed in most US states and territories, which typically require additional supervised experience and licensing examinations.)

Our clinical science program prepares graduate students for research-oriented careers at universities, medical schools, or settings that integrate research and evaluation along with professional services. The structure of tomorrow's health care systems should be based on the best scientific evidence available. Penn State's graduates play leading roles in this future—designing, building, overseeing, delivering, and evaluating the science-driven health-care systems of tomorrow.

Our faculty believes that excellence in clinical science is best provided by superior training in both scientific methods and evidence-based clinical assessment and intervention. Primary requirements for graduate students in our program include coursework, clinical practica, a masters research project, comprehensive examination, doctoral dissertation, and an APA accredited predoctoral internship. Students generally complete the masters by their second year, coursework by their third year, the comprehensive examination by their fourth or fifth year, the dissertation by the fifth or sixth year, and the predoctoral internship in the sixth or seventh year.

The Clinical Program requires that students: 1) complete a minimum of three full-time academic years of graduate study; 2) at least two of those three years at Penn State University; 3) at least one year in full-time residence; and 4) complete an APA accredited predoctoral internship before receiving the Ph.D. degree. However, it is typical for most students to spend 5-6 years in residence and 1 year in the predoctoral internship, completing all program requirements and acquiring requisite scientific and clinical skills in a timely fashion.

¹*Questions related to the program's PCASAS accredited status should be directed to the PCASAS:*

Psychological Clinical Science Accreditation System

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Phone: (301) 455-8046

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²Questions related to the Program's accredited status should be directed to the Commission on Accreditation:

Office of Program Consultation and Accreditation

American Psychological Association

750 1st Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002

Phone: (202) 336-5979 / E-mail: apaaccred@apa.org

Web: www.apa.org/ed/accreditation

Emphasis in Adult and Child Clinical Psychology

Students in the clinical program specialize in either adult or child clinical psychology. However, training within either specialty is not limited to that age group and both research and clinical experiences with additional populations are available. Prospective students indicate on their applications an interest in one of the two tracks.

Adult Track

Training in the adult track provides integrative training in clinical research, assessment, and intervention with adults. Faculty areas of research specialization are in psychotherapy process and outcome, personality assessment and personality disorders, multicultural factors in psychopathology, clinical neuropsychology, anxiety disorders and PTSD, intimate partner violence, emotion regulation, sports-related concussion, neuroscience, and addiction. Faculty labs employ a range of advanced research methods including brain imaging, ecological momentary assessment and experience sampling, and psychophysiological assessment, often integrated with direct clinical interviews.

The Psychological Clinic includes a Practice Research Network, allowing students streamlined access to clinical populations for research and promoting the seamless integration of science and practice. Students also gain extensive clinical experiences in cognitive behavioral and psychodynamic therapies, clinical neuropsychology, diagnostic assessment, and crisis management.

Adult clinical students wishing to develop a minor area of specialization (e.g., Women's Studies, Health Psychology, Methodology) or complete the Specialization in Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience (SCAN), may do so by taking additional coursework.

Child Track

Training in the child track lies at the interface of developmental and clinical child psychology and emphasizes research and intervention with individuals ranging in age from infancy to young adulthood. Students in this track obtain specialized training in: (1) developmental psychopathology, understanding the effects of biological, cognitive, social, emotional, and family and community factors on typical and atypical development; (2) research translating knowledge to interventions for early childhood mental health, school readiness, stress related to poverty and acculturation, and parenting problems associated with risk for maltreatment; and (3) mental health services to children and families, including evidence-based intervention, school-based consultation, and comprehensive neuropsychological evaluation.

Specific areas of expertise in the child track faculty include toddler emotion development, stress and coping in children and adolescents, neuropsychology of disruptive behavior disorders, parenting and child maltreatment, and prevention science. Faculty labs employ a range of advanced research methods including psychophysiological assessments, intensive observational methods, state-of-the-art data analytic techniques for longitudinal and within-person analysis, and community and field research.

Students also gain extensive clinical experience in cognitive-behavioral and family-based therapies, clinical neuropsychology, diagnostic assessment, and crisis management.

Child track students are required to complete a minor specialization in Developmental Psychology or Human Development. Some students may also choose a developmental focus as part of the Specialization in Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience (SCAN).

Clinical Psychology Program: Sequence and Requirements

Undergraduate Preparation

The clinical psychology program assumes that students begin their graduate coursework with prior foundational knowledge in history & systems and affective, biological, cognitive, developmental, and social bases of behavior. Graduate level training providing Discipline Specific Knowledge is assumed to build on this prior foundational knowledge. An undergraduate degree in Psychology is not required for admission. However, all students entering the program after 2018, whether Psychology majors or not, are required to achieve a passing score (greater than the 50th percentile) on the GRE Psychology Subject Test before or soon after entering the program to demonstrate prior foundational knowledge. Adequate written and oral fluency in English must also be demonstrated.

The Clinical Psychology Major

The Clinical Psychology program encourages flexibility in attaining student academic and professional goals but all students, nonetheless, must take required courses, including clinical practica, and meet specific research milestones. In general, students are expected to engage in both research and practice throughout their graduate training, in addition to required course work.

The curriculum includes required courses in research methods, statistics, psychopathology, developmental psychopathology, clinical interventions, clinical assessment, and various courses that meet minor specialization requirements. Students must also meet graduate level Discipline Specific Knowledge requirements covering history & systems and affective, biological, cognitive, developmental, and social bases of behavior. In many cases, these are met through core required courses. Through formal coursework, clinical practica, teaching and research assistantships, service, participation in workshops, presenting at conferences, and other professional training throughout graduate school, students develop required core Profession-Wide Competencies in research, intervention, assessment, ethical and legal issues, professional values, attitudes, & behaviors, communications and interpersonal skills, supervision, consultation and interprofessional/interdisciplinary skills, and knowledge of and sensitivity to individual and cultural diversity.

Research Training

Students are expected to be involved in research each semester they are enrolled in the program. Students come into the program to work primarily with one faculty mentor with the goal of producing publishable research that contributes important knowledge to the field. However, all students are required to do research with at least one other faculty member during their time at Penn State. Most students are authors on several research publications by the time they complete the program, which, combined with excellent clinical training, makes them competitive for top clinical internships, positions in academia, academic medical centers, and other research-oriented settings.

Adult Track. Adult track students are required to complete at least three independent research projects during their graduate career: a Masters project, a Minor project, and a Dissertation, one of which must be designed by the student (with the help of the mentor) and carried through to the end. Adult track students typically fulfill the minor project with a faculty member other than their primary advisor. The Minor project should result in a high-quality written product of publishable quality that is typically submitted as part of the student's Comprehensive Examination, which also includes written responses to questions that have been provided to the students in advance.

Child Track. Child track students are required to complete at least three independent research projects during their graduate career: a Masters project, a Depth Paper, and a Dissertation. The Depth Paper is a high-quality written product of publishable quality that is part of the student's Comprehensive Examination, which also includes written responses to questions that have been provided to the students in advance. The depth paper may be an empirical or theoretical paper or a research grant proposal.

Clinical Training

The majority of practicum training takes place in our Psychological Clinic. Much of the supervision is provided by our core faculty, who embody the clinical science model in their daily professional lives and are actively engaged in clinically relevant scientific research and clinical supervision. A research infrastructure exists within the clinic (The Practice Research Network) to support student- and faculty-initiated scientific research on clinically meaningful questions in a naturalistic setting.

As one of the major service providers for Centre County, the Clinic provides services to clients with a wide range of psychological problems and diverse needs. Services provided include adult and child assessment; consultation with parents, schools, and public officials; individual and group therapy; marital and family counseling; psychodiagnostic and neuropsychological assessment; and community mental health consultation.

Most training takes place through practicum teams in a series of graded experiences ranging in degree of difficulty of the cases and progressing from interviewing to assessment and treatment. Students can acquire specialized training in cognitive-behavioral, psychodynamic, family systems, dialectical-behavioral, and trauma-focused cognitive-behavioral therapies. Advanced clinical students may be funded by Clinic Assistantships to acquire additional experience. All practicum experiences include direct observation of student work. Learning experiences and close faculty supervision are aided by digital video recording facilities. Some students also complete off-site externships.

Policies Related to Preparing Professional Psychologists to Serve a Diverse Public

In our APA-accredited program, faculty, students, and staff are united in our commitment to uphold the aspirations articulated in the APA Multicultural Guidelines: "to recognize and understand that as cultural beings, psychologists hold attitudes and beliefs that can influence their perceptions of and interactions with others as well as their clinical and empirical conceptualizations. As such, psychologists strive to move beyond conceptualizations rooted in categorical assumptions, biases, and/or formulations based on limited knowledge about individuals and communities" (APA, 2017). We further recognize that psychological science, including clinical psychology, has historically excluded the perspectives of those with less power, privilege, and status, which may create personal and professional "blind spots" for working with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, our training ensures that graduate students are provided the opportunity to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to work effectively with members of the public who embody intersecting demographics, attitudes, beliefs, and values. We believe the provision of an equitable, supportive, and inclusive environment for all clients, faculty, and students, is foundational to our training mission.

In support of our mission, our program provides opportunities for students to examine how their own attitudes, beliefs, and values may affect their professional competencies in treating members of the public. In recognition of the fact that integrating personal beliefs and values with professional competence is a developmental process, supervisors work together with students to identify instances when it may not be in the client's and student's best interest to work together. Ultimately, however, students cannot choose to avoid working with specific client populations or refuse to develop professional competencies *solely* on the basis of the students' attitudes, beliefs, or values and students may be assigned to treat clients who challenge their perspectives, experiences, or beliefs. In these instances, we support students in finding a belief- or value-congruent path that allows them to work in a professionally competent manner with such clients. As with any other professional core competency, failure to meet levels of competence set forth are first addressed with a remediation plan; unsuccessful remediation could lead to dismissal from the clinical psychology doctoral training program.

Internship

All clinical students must complete a 12-month APA accredited internship, typically in their sixth or seventh year, before receiving the Ph.D. degree. Students select internships that best fit their developing professional interests. Generally, students are placed in medical school centers, Veterans Administration hospitals, child guidance centers, psychiatric hospitals, or community clinics--some with general comprehensive programs and others with specialized programs.

The Pennsylvania State University is committed to the policy that all persons shall have equal access to programs, facilities, admission, and employment without regard to personal characteristics not related to ability, performance, or qualifications as determined by University policy or by state or federal authorities. The Pennsylvania State University does not discriminate against any person because of age, ancestry, color, disability or handicap, national origin, race, religious creed, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran status. Direct all inquiries regarding the nondiscrimination policy to the Affirmative Action Director, The Pennsylvania State University, 201 Willard Building, University Park, PA 16802-2801; tel. (814) 865-4700