

Clinical Psychology M.A. Program

Frequently Asked Questions

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Choosing a Program and License(s) to Pursue

1. What are the main differences between Clinical Psychology and Counseling?

Although roles and practices overlap, training in clinical psychology focuses more on treating individuals with psychopathology. Counseling traditionally focuses more on common issues that psychologically healthy individuals encounter, such as stress, grief, and vocational guidance, even though “clinical mental health counseling” programs sound a lot like clinical psychology. Clinical psychology programs typically base training on psychological science, and are situated in departments alongside other *psychology* programs at universities. Conversely, counseling programs are typically situated within departments of *education*. Counseling programs can prepare students to pursue an LPC license (see answer 3 below), whereas our clinical psychology program allows students the choice of training toward an LPC or an LPA, which some students may prefer (see answer 4 below). When choosing your preference, it may help to review programs’ specific curriculum and available practicum and internship opportunities and settings. For example, moving forward, both licenses (LPC and LPA) will require at least 60 hours of specific coursework. Also, you may find it informative to read about distinctions between clinical psychotherapy and counseling philosophies and practices, which is beyond the scope of this brief FAQ.

2. What are the main differences between Clinical Psychology and Marriage and Family Therapy?

Clinical psychology tends to approach the conceptualization and treatment of problems of living from a different theoretical perspective than marriage and family therapy (MFT), with a greater focus on the role of each individual’s psychological functioning on the development and maintenance of psychopathology. Although both disciplines consider social and family environmental influences on behavior, MFT tends to place more emphasis on how relationships and family systems affect behavior than on the psychology of the individual.

3. How is the LMFT license different than LPC and LPA licenses? Would licensure as an LPC or LPA allow me to counsel couples and families, or provide a broader range of job opportunities than licensure as an LMFT?

A person credentialed as a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) or Licensed Psychological Associate (LPA) will tend to have more flexibility as far as job opportunities, compared to those licensed as Marriage and Family Therapists (LMFT). LPCs and LPAs often work with individuals (adults and children), as well as couples and families. People licensed as LMFTs are allowed to treat individuals, but they typically specialize in working with couples or families. LPCs, LPAs, and LMFTs are permitted by their licensure to practice independently in Texas (that is, without supervision). It should be noted that some marriage and family therapy students ultimately obtain both LMFT

and LPC licensure in order to broaden their future employment opportunities. However, family therapy students may not be eligible to obtain an LPA based on specific course requirements of the Texas State Board of Examiners of Psychologists. If you are unsure about which program of study fits more closely with your interests, we encourage you discuss the issue more thoroughly with community professionals from both disciplines.

4. Why do students pursue an LPC vs. an LPA?

Historically, many of our students have pursued licensure as an LPC (Licensed Professional Counselor) because in Texas, once full licensure is obtained, LPCs are able to practice independently, without a supervisor. Until recently, in Texas, Licensed Psychological Associates (LPAs) were not allowed to practice independently and thus were only able to provide psychological services under the supervision of another professional (usually a psychologist). However, LPAs now have a path to independent practice if they meet specific criteria (see October 6, 2017 Texas Register for details). In general, students might pursue an LPA if their training and career interests align more closely with clinical psychology than with counseling (see item #1) and want their post-degree clinical hours to be supervised by a Licensed Psychologist (hours toward LPC must be supervised by a board-approved LPC Supervisor). Within our program, where one may pursue training toward either an LPA or LPC, students who pursue an LPA may be less interested in taking LPC-board-required courses in career counseling, addictions counseling, or family therapy, which allows students opportunities to take other courses. It should be noted that LPA and LPC licenses are administered by different boards (see answer #5) in Texas, and each have differing rules concerning post-graduation supervisor qualifications. Students should consider this question, but do not need to decide before coming into the program.

5. Would I have a license after completing your program?

No. The state of Texas (not individual universities) regulates the licensure of professions. Our program is constructed to provide students with the coursework and preliminary practical experience necessary to meet the academic requirements determined by the State of Texas to be necessary, in part, for licensure as either a Professional Counselor or a Psychological Associate (LPA). These credentials are awarded by the [Texas State Board of Examiners of Professional Counselors](#) (for LPCs) or the [Texas State Board of Examiners of Psychologists](#) (for LPAs). Both boards have additional requirements beyond academic coursework which must be met in order to obtain licensure (e.g., successfully passing an examination of knowledge of the discipline; completing a specified number of contact hours post-graduation under the supervision of a board-approved supervisor, etc.) We encourage you to read these board rules and requirements carefully before beginning your graduate study so that you are familiar with steps necessary for licensure, if that is your goal. If you plan to practice in a state other than Texas, be aware that licensure laws differ by state and our

curriculum may not meet other states' requirements. Thus, review the rules of the state in which you hope to practice so that you can plan accordingly.

6. How do program graduates perform on the licensing exam?

Historically, our graduates have done very well on the exam required for licensure (~99%).

7. Is the Clinical Psychology M.A. program CACREP or APA accredited?

No, only counseling programs are eligible for CACREP accreditation. Therefore, as a clinical psychology program, we are not CACREP accredited. Additionally, the APA (American Psychological Association) only accredits doctoral programs. Thus, M.A. programs such as ours cannot obtain APA accreditation. We *are* part of the Council of Applied Masters Programs in Psychology (CAMPP).

Admissions Topics

1. Where can I find the instructions and materials needed to apply to the program?

Application instructions and materials are linked to the Clinical Psychology master's program website.

2. When can I apply?

The admissions process happens once a year, beginning with the late fall application deadline and finishing in mid-spring, after on-site applicant interviews.

3. What are my chances of being admitted?

Gaining admission to the program is competitive. In recent years, we have admitted between 10-15% of applicants after interviewing approximately 30% of those who apply. Due to program capacity limitations, we are only able to accept those who present the very strongest applications and interviews, meaning that some qualified applicants will not be accepted into the program.

4. What are characteristics of students who are admitted and succeed in the program?

Admitted students typically have an undergraduate GPA of 3.4 or above and a combined Graduate Record Exam (GRE) score above 300. They typically have very strong letters of recommendation, usually from at least one or more professors or supervisors in a

mental health-relevant setting. They often have some experience volunteering or working in a setting relevant to applied mental health services (e.g., crisis line, domestic violence shelter, psychotherapy clinical trial, etc.) and often have worked a year or more in a psychological research lab. Overall, they tend to have a record that demonstrates productivity, reliability, and a passion for the field. Also, successful students are compassionate, intellectually curious, and have strong interpersonal skills.

5. What can one do to improve chances of being admitted?

The admissions committee evaluates all application materials, in particular, the Graduate Record Exam (GRE), prior academic records, prior experiences in settings relevant to clinical work, prior experiences in psychology or mental health research, and letters of recommendation. Thus, if an applicant's GPA or GRE is lower than those indicated above (typical characteristics of students who are accepted), then it is important that other parts of his or her application indicate an extraordinary strength in some other area of performance (e.g., research experience, prior academic performance, clinical experience, and letters of recommendation). We encourage individuals to meet with their mentors (those they hope to provide letters of recommendation) to discuss ways to strengthen their applications. We do not have the resources to provide this guidance ourselves.

6. Can I meet with you about my application?

The program receives a large number of applications and has only a few faculty. Thus, we are unable to provide detailed, individualized information to individuals either before or after the application process. Unfortunately, resource limitations also make it impossible for us to admit every candidate likely to be a successful graduate student. We offer admission to those whose applications are comparatively strongest during each admission period, and some students with outstanding potential are not offered admission. If you fall into that category, we encourage you to read over all relevant FAQ answers, particularly other FAQ answers under the Admissions heading, and consider applying again in the future (see below). We also make the Student Handbook available on the website and encourage you to read it to learn more about the program.

7. If I am not admitted the first time, should I re-apply?

We recommend that applicants who are not offered admission during a given admissions period consider the competitiveness of their application by comparing their performance to the criteria listed in Admissions Topics answer #4. Applicants with scores substantially lower than those typically admitted are unlikely to gain admission if they re-apply unless these scores have changed in the interim (e.g., they subsequently score higher on the GRE). We would encourage applicants to discuss their application and their approach to interviewing with a trusted mentor (for example, one of those asked to write a letter of recommendation). Sometimes applicants can improve their

applications by significantly increasing relevant experiences (e.g., volunteer work in a clinical setting) or by demonstrating excellence in some other area (e.g., research productivity, exceptional performance in a course taught by clinical psychology faculty) prior to re-applying.

Employment and Financial Assistance during Program

1. Is it possible to be a part-time student in the program?

Our students tend to enroll and remain full-time students throughout their time in the program. Students typically complete four courses each fall and spring semester, and two courses during the summer. Students who make a full-time commitment to completing the program have been more successful on average and have had a richer experience in the program. Although completing the program as a part-time student is possible, it can be very challenging to stay on course and finish in a timely manner. For example, many courses are only offered once a year, and if a student is unable to complete a required prerequisite course in a given year, his or her progression through the program could be delayed by a full year.

2. Are students able to work while enrolled in the program?

The program is quite challenging for students, and therefore, full-time employment during the program is strongly discouraged. However, many students choose to maintain some form of part-time employment (less than 20 hours/week). This works best when the position allows for flexible hours, particularly outside of typical business hours (8-5), when most program courses are offered. It is currently not possible to navigate the program without completing courses and practica during typical business hours.

3. What financial aid, scholarships, assistantships, and stipends (if any) are available for the clinical psychology program?

The program does not have unique avenues for financial compensation. Paid teaching assistantships are extremely rare and typically are not available to students as they are starting the program. The university offers some – but typically modest—opportunities for financial aid (see <http://prtl.uhcl.edu/financial-aid>). There are also sources of partial reimbursement for research-related expenses (e.g., professional conference travel) from the CPSA student organization and Hastings Family Fund.

Progressing through the Program Curriculum

1. How does student advising and mentoring work?

Students are paired with an academic advisor at the start of the program. That person is a resource for the student throughout their time in the program. However, typically the majority of advising takes place in an orientation at the outset of the program. Students learn what courses to take when, and both the student and advisor sign off on a Candidate Plan of Study (CPS). Students receive a significant amount of informal individualized feedback and guidance from all members of the faculty as they progress in the program. There is no formal “mentor model.” However, students who are interested in research and/or pursuing doctoral studies often will align with a mentor (or co-mentors) who may have expertise in areas of research that overlap with their interests.

2. May I complete program coursework online?

No, the program’s training experience is provided via in-class lectures, discussion, and learning of applied clinical skills. We believe that the type of training we provide cannot be adequately provided through online means. Thus, very few of the courses required for our program are available online (2 out of 21). The vast majority of students complete the program without ever taking online courses.

Training Experiences while Completing Clinical Psychology M.A.

1. What kinds of external practica (internships) are available and how are they arranged?

After completing a two-semester internal practicum at the UHCL Psychological Services Clinic, students complete a two-semester external practicum (what we call an “internship”). Our program has established and maintains positive relationships with a broad array of internship sites in the greater Houston area which provide students with many options for extending their clinical training. Sites include traditional outpatient mental health clinics, medical settings, and correctional settings. We host a yearly internship fair, where students have the opportunity to learn about and develop contacts at internship sites. After a few semesters in the program, each student meets with the faculty Internship Coordinator for advising on how to arrange an internship that matches his or her interests.

2. Are there opportunities for specialization in particular areas (e.g., substance abuse, OCD, eating disorders)?

Our program provides generalist clinical training, so a breadth of specialty areas are covered. In a two-year program, specialization is impossible without sacrificing breadth. Students wanting to set a foundation for specialization can join a research lab (see website for faculty research interests) and in some cases arrange for an external practicum (internship) in an area of particular interest.

3. Is it possible to get an Applied Behavior Analysis certification?

It is possible to complete the clinical psychology program and complete requirements to earn an ABA certification, which allows you to sit for the BCBA exam. However, getting the certification requires at least another year in the program, beyond the two years required for the clinical program.

Post-Graduation Career and Educational Options

1. What kinds of jobs do clinical psychology program M.A. graduates land after they graduate?

Our graduates succeed in a wide variety of settings with a diversity of client populations. About 80% choose to stay in the mental health field (those who do not typically remain in a career they had established prior to entering the program). Although some of our graduates leave the area, many prefer to find work in the greater Houston area. Below is a list of some of the Houston area agencies and sites where our graduates have found employment in recent years.

Center for Success and Independence
Depelchin Children's Services
Ft. Bend Juvenile Probation
Family Service Center of Galveston County
Houston's Women's Center
MHMRA
Harris County Youth Village
Houston Eating Disorder Center
Houston OCD Program
Innovative Alternatives
Montrose Counseling Center
TX Dept. of Criminal Justice, UTMB
The Women's Home
Cypress Creek Hospital
Harris County Psychiatric Center
MD Anderson Cancer Center
Shriners Hospital – UTMB
Texas Children's Hospital
UT Center for Neurobehavioral Research on Addiction

2. Do your students apply and get accepted into doctoral programs?

Yes, over the last decade, 15-20% of our students have chosen to apply for doctoral training. Around 90% of those who have devoted time and resources to building a competitive application have been accepted into Ph.D. programs. This rate is very high

considering that these doctoral programs typically accept only 4-8% of all individuals who apply. Some of the programs our students have been accepted to include:

Eastern Michigan University
Kansas State University
Oklahoma State University
Louisiana State University
Penn State University
Texas A & M University
University of Houston (Main Campus) – Clinical Psychology Ph.D.
University of Houston (Main Campus) – Counseling Psychology Ph.D.
University of Houston-Clear Lake – Combined Clinical-School PsyD.
University of Kansas
University of Miami
University of Missouri, Kansas City
University of North Texas
University of Texas Southwestern
University of Texas School Psychology
University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee
Utah State University
Virginia Commonwealth University
Western Michigan University
West Virginia University
Wichita State University
UCSD-SDSU Joint Doctoral Program

3. Is the UHCL Clinical Psychology M.A. a “feeder program” for the PsyD in Health Service Psychology?

No. Although UHCL’s PsyD is a post-master’s (or post-LSSP) degree, it has its own separate application process and distinct curricular mission. Admissions to the PsyD program tends to be even more selective than admissions for the Clinical Psychology M.A. program. Moreover, the PsyD program focus and entrance requirements go beyond what is required in the M.A. program (which has been constructed to meet academic requirements for LPC or LPA licensure). M.A. students planning to apply to the PsyD program should consult the PsyD website for more details and may consider supplementing their curriculum with courses that might meet PsyD requirements if the student is later accepted into the PsyD program.

Transfer Topics

1. May I transfer in credits from another clinical psychology master’s program?

It is possible to transfer credits, however this requires meeting particular criteria. First the student must have passed the course with an appropriate grade (B- or higher), and the course must closely align with learning objectives and practices of the program

course it is intended to replace. If the course was not completed at UHCL, the student must provide a detailed syllabus of the course they are requesting to transfer and they must obtain a written endorsement from the instructor who taught the course at the students' former institution. The request to transfer in credits ultimately must be approved by the UHCL Clinical Psychology M.A. program faculty.

2. I am enrolled in a psychology masters' program at another university. Can I transfer into or take classes in the UHCL Clinical Psychology Program?

A student may not simply transfer into our program. Our program is highly competitive, and the only way to be accepted to the program is to apply in late fall. Thus, in order for an individual to take classes or transfer in, she or he needs to first gain acceptance into the program. To graduate from the program a student would still need to complete the total number of hours required for the degree, but he or she may be able to substitute additional classes to meet that requirement.

3. Do I have to be admitted to the Clinical Psychology Program to take classes taught by program faculty?

In most cases, yes. However, there are a few courses taught by program faculty that can be applied to the clinical psychology master's degree if the student is later accepted into the program. Examples include Dr. Short's Child Behavioral Medicine course, Dr. Bistricky's Mood and Anxiety Disorders course, Dr. Elkins' Behavioral Parent Training course, and Dr. Marek's Adult Behavioral Medicine course.

4. If I am a student in the UHCL General Psychology master's program or a "non-degree-seeking" graduate student, which classes would transfer into the clinical psychology program?

There are about 9 classes in the General Psychology curriculum that will directly transfer if a student is admitted into our program (Career Counseling, Biological Basis of Behavior, Research Methods and Statistics I and II, Human Growth and Development, and Therapy Electives such as Behavioral Medicine, Behavioral Parent Training, and Development and Treatment of Mood and Anxiety Disorders). The university allows non-degree-seeking students to complete up to 12 total hours, however these students can potentially be approved to enroll in additional hours if approval is obtained from Associate Dean. When emailing the Associate Dean to seek this approval, be sure to copy the Chair of the Department of Clinical, Health, and Applied Sciences as well. (Note that non-degree-seeking status affects eligibility for financial aid). Alternatively, a student may enroll at UHCL as an undecided/undeclared graduate student and take some of the above-mentioned courses. If a student has already completed the above-mentioned classes prior to admission, it will still take at least 1.5 years to complete the rest of the clinical program.