CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY: WHAT TO EXPECT IN GRAD SCHOOL AND BEYOND

What do you believe are some of the benefits and perks of having a degree in clinical psychology?

Liz: I guess I'll contrast that with having a masters in clinical psychology. There is obviously a difference in depth of training and the amount of time spent in practicum. There is also something called the Psy. D. program, which allows for a wider range of jobs than a M.S.W. This program gives you more chances at administrative jobs, which is why I chose it.

Jen: I had a M.A. but didn’t feel comfortable practicing yet. You don’t need a doctorate though. There are a variety of job settings like residential, school, research, consultation, etc. The main reason I went into clinical psychology is because it's always changing.

Jeff: I chose clinical psychology because you can’t be called a psychologist without a doctorate. There is more weight given to a doctorate than a M.A. or social work license.

Do you know if there’s a demand for clinical psychology these days, and what does salary depend on?

Jeff: Salary is variable on how much you do. There’s more flexibility and choice in Psy.D. clinical degrees like consulting, teaching, and private or group practice.

Jen: How much you get paid also depends on what part of the country you live in. I know that the University of Wyoming was desperate for clinical faculty members. You can still make good money at the masters level, especially now with managed care, and the salary is on the rise. The mercy of managed care also determines what salary you get.

What are some of the differences between a Ph.D. and a Psy.D.?

Ph.D.: This degree is geared more towards those who want to do more research and teach in the future. You do get some practice, but the Psy.D. concentrates more on that. There are fewer and smaller classes in grad school, but professors teach more towards the research than counseling. These programs typically receive more funding than Psy.D. programs and are usually cognitive and behavioral in focus, though this is not a universal generalization.

Psy.D.: This degree focuses more on the clinical practice than the Ph.D. You do have to do a dissertation but it is not as big as one for your Ph.D. Also, this degree is lesser known, as of now, but is gaining more respect. If you are someone to whom the title is important, then you should probably go for the Ph.D. instead. There are still opportunities to do research but that does not have to be your primary interest. There is more freedom and leeway to choose in the Psy.D. program. Training in these programs also allow you to be a better practitioner because of its larger focus on clinical practice than the Ph.D. program.

Most places hire and pay the same for Psy.D. and Ph.D.

Rutgers University does offer a Ph.D. program, but GSAPP does not.
As an undergraduate interested in getting into a clinical program in graduate school, where should you be year to year?

Liz: Basically, if you plan to go to grad school straight after college, then a good time to start thinking of taking your GREs is during your junior year.

Jeff: Back in when I was taking the GREs and they were still done by hand, you had to plan more carefully when you were going to take the GREs, but nowadays it’s on the computer so there are more test dates available. But I agree with Liz – Junior year is a good benchmark.

Jen: I personally didn’t start thinking of grad school until February of my senior year and I took the GREs in April and then applied to schools with deadlines after that. So don’t worry that it’s too late!!

Liz: Don’t worry about going to grad school straight out of college if you don’t want to. You can get a job to get a better idea of how you feel about clinical work and whether or not you’re willing to spend five or more years doing it in grad school.

What are some classes that you recommend interested students take as undergraduates?

Liz: Basically, and they do here at Rutgers, a psychology major has a list of core requirements and those are the classes that you should make sure you take.

Jen: It is also important to get some clinical experience, especially research experience if you plan to apply to a Ph.D. program. And it’s also important and helpful to start getting to know faculty members now. But as for classes, I guess physiological, Child, Developmental, History in Systems, Social, and Abnormal are some.

What are the GREs and how do you think students should prepare for them?

Liz: The GREs are similar to the SATs. As for the subject test, any general psychology book is a good study guide. Just flip through and study from that.

Jen: I would also recommend getting a book with practice questions so that you can get a better understanding of how questions are phrased and what to expect. Like Liz said, for the subject test, flip through any general psychology book.

What do you think are some effective ways to search for grad schools?

Jen: I would recommend a particular book. It’s called Insider’s Guide to Graduate Programs in Clinical and Counseling Psychology (by Mayne, Norcross, Sayette published by Guilford Press). The book gives you percents on what percent of the faculty focuses on what types of theory. It provides you with a lot of information about particular programs so that you can get a better idea.

Liz: There are a lot of websites and books that give you lists of the APA accredited schools, and tell you about the interests of those programs. There’s a book put out by the APA that
chronicles every APA accredited school and gives you average GRE scores and areas of interest.

Do you make any money while you’re in grad school?

Ph.D.: More likely to get tuition remission and a stipend to live on because you’re basically working while you’re in the program. Ph.D. programs usually have more funding than Psy.D. programs.

Psy.D.: You do pay tuition money because you are more like a student. It’s rare to get full tuition remission and stipends in these programs.

Jeff: But I do want to add that once you’re in a Psy.D. program, you do have more leverage to get money because they want you in their program. So what I’m basically saying is don’t take no for an answer.

What do you plan to do when you get out of grad school?

Liz: I am focusing on severe mental illnesses and homelessness, especially in the NYC area. Maybe I’ll work in an outpatient clinic or do prison psychology. On the side, I’d like to have a private client or two.

Is it true that Rutgers University is strongly behavioral/cognitive?

Psy.D. program is not – it has a nice balance and more flexibility. Ph.D. program is STRONGLY behavioral/cognitive.

What are some distinguishing qualities of a superior program?

Jeff: It really depends on your fit and the program itself.

Liz: I recommend going to school and asking the students there about the program.

Josh: A superior program really has to do with your own strengths. When you’re researching schools, do what you’re good at. If you’re good at reading websites, then do that.

Jen: Be weary of how and where you apply. You absolutely want to make sure that you feel comfortable in the program and also the area. You’re going to be living there while you’re in school, so make sure that it’s a place that you don’t mind living in.

Do you have any time in graduate school for things other than work?

Liz: I find that I have plenty of time to have a life. I have lots of choice.
Jen: I’ll say, make time for yourself because grad school can get stressful. Talk to other students to figure out the kind of environment. Make sure you’re choosing the right program for you.

Josh: You have to make the time for yourself. Don’t let it all just be grad school all the time.

**How important do you think it is to receive some sort of therapy yourself if you want to be a clinician?**

Jen: I’m a strong advocate of therapy. I think it can be helpful to anyone, even if you don’t want to be a therapist.

Josh: Also, it’s the best way to know how the process works. You’d be on the other side and then you can decide what parts of it you like and want to do when you practice, and not do the parts you don’t like.

**Concluding remarks: It’s never too late to apply to grad schools. Don’t give up. If you want to do clinical psychology, do it.**

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Resource Sheet for Students Geared Towards Clinical Psychology

You can find us on the web at:
http://psych.rutgers.edu/psychclub – UNDER CONSTRUCTION!
http://psych.rutgers.edu/psichi
Email us: ru-psyched@excite.com

http://www.gsappweb.rutgers.edu
GSAPP’s website

http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/beyond/bchome.htm
The US News and World Report grad school guide for 2002

http://www.clas.ufl.edu/CLAS/american-universities.html#A
Links for a plethora of American universities

http://www.psychwww.com/resource/deptlist.htm
An impressive listing of over 1000 psychology department websites

http://www.mindcampus.com
Comprehensive site addressing issues of different areas of clinical psychology, how to get into graduate school, and the nature of graduate school

http://www.petersons.com/graduate/select/224010se.html
Brief descriptions of programs offering graduate training in clinical psychology

http://www.gradschools.com/listings/menus/psych_clinic_menu.html
For searching clinical psychology programs, with the added ability to search by geographical region

Sample guidelines during the undergraduate experience in preparation for grad school

http://www.gradschools.com/listings/menus/psych_clinic_menu.html
Links available for research into graduate schools all over the world

http://www.alleydog.com
Site for psychology students who want serious help