

California Lutheran

UNIVERSITY

Department of Psychology

SO, WHAT ABOUT GRADUATE SCHOOL?

We have put together the following information to help you plan for obtaining an advanced degree in psychology. This information is in response to frequently asked questions about differences among various degrees in Psychology and what is needed in order to obtain admission to advanced degree programs. In addition to this overview, we have available in the Psych Assistants office ((Swenson 208): [Graduate Study in Psychology](#) (APA guide to all accredited graduate programs in psychology), and materials from most graduate programs filed by state.

BA/BS

While these degrees prepare students for a wide variety of jobs in both the public and private sector following graduation, jobs as a professional psychologist are not available with a BA or BS and usually require an advanced degree. If you are thinking of going on for a Ph.D. or a Psy.D, we usually recommend the BS since a broad and solid background in psychology makes a student more competitive in getting into these graduate programs.

MA/MS

This allows a student to work under the supervision of a licensed psychologist (i.e., in a clinic or institution), or to teach and/or counsel at community colleges in California. California does not license psychologists or counselors (except MFTC) at the master's level, although some other states do. Masters programs sometimes do not require G.R.E. scores for admission especially if GPA is high. Admission is based on GPA and letters of recommendation. Internship and volunteer experiences usually provide an additional edge in getting into the better masters programs. A master's degree (like CLU's Master in Clinical Psychology) can be an advantage in getting into a Ph.D. or Psy.D. program because it demonstrates your ability to do graduate work and research. If you are using the masters as a stepping stone to a Ph.D., do a good thesis and/or other independent research while you are in the masters program. Ph.D. programs, looking at master degree students, place heavy emphasis on the quality of their research. CLU offers two Masters Programs. See Dr. Puopolo for more information about CLU's masters programs. If you plan to continue on to a Ph.D. in a particular field of psychology after obtaining a masters degree, it is wise to choose a master's program in that particular field.

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Psy. D.

This degree is a relatively recent development and prepares a student to be a professional psychologist, licensed in the State of California to do independent clinical work (other states vary in their acceptance of this degree for licensure). This degree is not the best route if you want a career teaching as a college or university professor. About 20% of faculty at colleges and universities have a Psy. D.. Admission to these programs is competitive and good GRE scores are essential along with field and /or research experience and good letters of recommendation. We recommend the Clinical Practicum (494) and/or the Research Practicum(495) as well as any other field experience you can get (i.e., Internship) in order to make your application to a Psy.D. program competitive. Competencies to emphasize include: Written and Oral Communication, Quantitative Reasoning, Cultural Perspectives, Critical Thinking, Values and Judgment, Interpersonal Skills, Empirical Methodology and Field Specific Knowledge. Many Psy.D. programs (i.e., Pepperdine) prefer people with a Masters degree (and give one year of credit towards the Psy.D.).

Ph. D.

You may receive a Ph.D. in either an experimental or clinical area. Experimental areas include Social, Developmental, Cognitive, Learning, etc. (too many to list). A Ph.D. in experimental prepares a student primarily for university or college teaching/ research or work in the private sector. Admission is competitive and requires excellent grades, GRE scores above 1200 for the old GRE and 305 for the new GRE (higher for major research universities like UCLA), and great letters of recommendation. As an undergraduate a BS is suggested. Research and/or field experience is necessary in order to be competitive. In addition to the five required courses for the major, suggested undergraduate courses to prepare for admission to an experimental program include: Human Cognition, Sensation and Perception, Principles of Learning and Memory and/or History and Systems, and courses in your area of interest. Check to see what the school you are applying to requires. Particularly important competencies to acquire are: Written Communication, Quantitative Reasoning, Critical Thinking and Empirical Methodology, and Field Specific Knowledge.

A Ph.D. in clinical psychology prepares a student for licensure as an independent practitioner as well as for an academic career. These graduate programs are impacted and highly competitive. Admission is based heavily on GRE scores (1250 is probably minimum for old GRE or 310 for new GRE; professional schools may have lower requirements), GPA (3.6 or better), field and research experience, and excellent letters of recommendation. In addition to the five required courses for the major, suggested undergraduate courses to prepare for admission to a clinical program include: Theories of Personality, Human Cognition, Psychological Testing, Principles of Learning and Memory and History and Systems. In addition, you should consider (if you qualify) doing Honors in Psychology which requires a thesis and completing the BS in Psychology which includes the additional course in Advanced Research Design and Statistics (Psy

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412). Particularly important Competencies to acquire are: Written Communication, Oral Communication, Quantitative Reasoning, Critical Thinking, Interpersonal Skills, Empirical Methodology.

If you are interested in a Ph.D. Program, I would suggest a GRE preparation course (i.e., Princeton Review), getting as much field and research experience as possible while an undergraduate, and a rigorous set of courses. Outside of psychology, I recommend Calculus, that you take Chemistry and Biology to fulfill your Core 21 science requirements. You might also consider an emphasis area related to your field of interest in Psychology.

MFCC and LCSW Degrees

These degrees are not granted by psychology departments, but psychology students interested in counseling rather than research often go into these graduate programs. Both are licensable in California and most other states and allow practitioners to engage in private practice. The MFCC (Marriage and Family Counseling) is usually a two year degree and the LCSW (Licensed Clinical Social Worker) is a three to four year degree.

Letters of Recommendation

Letters of recommendation requested by graduate schools ask about a student's motivation to complete the degree, maturity and judgment, intellectual capability, creativity, writing and communication skills. We need to know you in order to write more than a perfunctory letter – so share your ideas and activities with us, don't just be a face in a class. When you request a letter of recommendation, please include a statement of your goals and purpose in attending graduate school (i.e., I want to do research on the causes of autism), why you chose these goals, relevant courses and grades, research, volunteer work or relevant job experiences, and extracurricular interests.