

## **Graduate School Training for Clinical Work in Mental Health:**

### **Master's Degree vs. PhD vs PsyD**

#### **Master's Degree in a Mental Health Area (Counseling, Social Work, Marriage and Family Therapy)**

Master's Programs typically take 2 years to complete. Names of credentials vary from program to program. Most Master's degrees are terminal degrees (i.e., the final degree you need to practice) in the field of Psychology, Counseling, Counselor Education, Community Counseling, Guidance and Counseling, Marriage and Family Therapy, or Clinical Social Work. The State of Wisconsin offers three licenses: Professional Counseling, Marriage and Family Therapy, and Independent Clinical Social Work. See link below for details. It sometimes helps to work backwards to identify the requirements. You first think of the U.S. states in which you might like to practice, and then you research the licensing requirements of that state. They are usually found in government departments with titles like "[Department of Safety & Professional Services](#)" (Wisconsin) or department of licensing.

For each of these three licenses, 3000 hours of post-graduate supervised clinical experience is required. 1,000 hours of this must be face-to-face with clients. "Supervised" refers to the credentials and experience of the person providing supervision for the graduate. For every ten hours of face-to-face therapy, one hour of supervision is required (100 hours total). These requirements for licensure typically take an additional two years (minimum) to complete. In the past, graduates struggled with the catch-22 challenge of having enough hours of supervised clinical experience to find a job...but needing a job to get those hours. The problem was that agencies were not able to hire a mental health professional who could not bill for their hours of work. This has changed!

The new regulation and licensing in Wisconsin in 2010 allows students who have graduated from an accredited program to acquire a training license in the appropriate field of Marriage and Family Therapy, Professional Counseling, or Social Work. Once they have this training license, they can bill 3<sup>rd</sup> party providers (i.e., insurance companies). This is a significant improvement in the ability of program graduates to find work. Training license holders still have to take an exam at any time during this period of two years (which can be extended to four years) and have to acquire 3,000 hours of supervised clinical experience in not less than a 24-month period of time and one hour of clinical supervision from an approved supervisor for every ten hours of clinical therapy in order to apply for a license in their designated field.

Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, Licensed Professional Counselors, and Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker in Wisconsin:

<http://legis.wisconsin.gov/statutes/Stat0457.pdf>

#### **PhD or Psy D in Clinical or Counseling Psychology**

PhD/PsyD programs typically take 4-6 years to complete—sometimes more—and eventually result in the designation of Licensed Psychologist (LP). A basic distinction between the PhD and PsyD is that the PhD program typically has more of a research focus while the PsyD program will have more a clinical focus, meaning more hours of exposure to a clinical population and subsequent clinical supervision. Programs usually include work toward the Master's and Doctoral degrees. A Master's thesis and Doctoral dissertation both need to be completed during the program (unless a student entered a doctoral program already having a Master's degree). It's possible to complete the requirements in 4

years, but that's pretty rare. It's wise for students to plan on 5-6 years to get through a program. It depends on how efficient a student is, especially when it comes to the thesis and dissertation research, in addition to the coursework and clinical requirements. Before the PhD or PsyD is awarded, a 1-year (approximately 2000-hour) clinical internship is required. Students apply and interview for internships in December-February of the final year of graduate school, and there is a match system that places students in internships that is like the one used for medical residency. Interns apply to potential sites much like they did for graduate school, (hopefully) get invited to interview at a few, and then rank order the potential internship sites. The internship sites also rank order all of their interviewees and a computer matches interns to sites based on an algorithm. **It is STRONGLY encouraged that students attend APA-accredited internships** as some states require it for licensing. Once the PhD/PsyD is awarded (the clinical internship must be completed and the dissertation must be defended), the typical route is to complete a postdoctoral fellowship to get the remaining hours needed for licensure. The number of supervised, postdoctoral clinical hours that are required is **determined by state licensing requirements**, but the hours can be completed in either a 1- or 2-year fellowship (also called a post-doc). During the fellowship year(s), preparation toward the state and national licensure exams are expected. A 2-year fellowship would allow more time to process and not feel so rushed! Getting hired for an actual job is obviously dependent on having the appropriate licensure processes completed. There are a few states where licensed psychologists are in such high demand that they have waived the post-doc hour requirement and grant licensure after internship and passing the national Examination for Professional Practice of Psychology (EPPP). These are usually states with very low population density where there are few practitioners over large geographic areas. There are even some states or regions that provide student debt forgiveness in exchange for agreeing to serve as a clinician in an underserved area for a specific number of years.

In Wisconsin, completed supervised experience refers to the following: Applicant must have 3,000 hours of supervised experience, of which a minimum of 1,500 hours follows completion of all requirements for the doctoral degree. This means that in the traditional 2000-hour internship, only 1,500 of those hours can be counted toward the 3,000 needed. The other 1,500 have to be supervised post-doc/fellowship hours. The person supervising the applicant must have at least 3 years of post-licensure experience and must have had training or experience in supervision of psychological work. See Psy 2.09(3), Wis. Stats., for a more complete description of supervised experience requirements. See below link for details.

<http://dsps.wi.gov/Default.aspx?Page=862369c7-1b68-420f-ac18-4318b99c040c>

## Discussion

Students often wonder whether they should go for a Masters, PhD, or PsyD. The clinical portion of training of all three tracks is much the same—it's almost impossible to tell one licensed therapist from another based solely on type of degree. It is much more important to find a quality program that fits your training and career goals. If you KNOW that you may one day want to teach or research at a university in a tenure-track position, the PhD is the right route. It takes longer because of additional coursework and experience with research. If, however, you KNOW you only want to practice clinical work, you will need to explore the Masters vs. PsyD routes. The PsyD (and PhD) provides additional training in psychological assessment which gives a therapist the training to conduct psychological evaluations (e.g., learning disabilities, forensic assessment, etc.). There are also some institutions that require a doctorate to practice (e.g., some divisions of the Veteran Affairs hospital system). If you don't

see yourself teaching or needing to conduct assessment, a terminal Masters degree is likely the right route. It will give you the training you need to be a therapist in a shorter amount of time and often with significantly less debt. Additionally, insurance companies are often more likely to refer their members to Masters-level clinicians over doctoral-level ones since the billing rate is often lower.

Another question students often ask is, "Should I get a Masters degree before I go for a doctorate?" That is not an easy question to answer as it depends on the graduate school. Many PhD programs will take strong applicants with a Bachelors degree provided they have excellent GPAs, GRE scores, and significant **undergraduate research experience**. One reason you might take the time to first get a Masters is if your GPA wasn't very competitive for undergrad and you want to show you are capable of succeeding in graduate school. In fact, many students enter doctorate programs thinking they will be able to skip out of one or two YEARS of coursework only to find that they pass out of only one or two COURSES. Doctoral programs are notorious for wanting full control of your graduate training experience, and will often require that you take their courses. Additionally, there are a few PhD and PsyD programs that require a Masters to even apply, so it makes the most sense to check the requirements of potential graduate schools before you make that decision.

### **Clinical Substance Abuse Counselor Certification.**

The State also offers a certification as a Clinical Substance Abuse Counselor. There is greater latitude in formal education to acquire this credential, and also greater levels of supervision and experience:

"Complete education. Must have graduated from an accredited school with an associate's, bachelor's, master's or a doctoral degree in a field of behavioral science and attend and complete 360 hours of specialized education in substance use disorder counseling within a comprehensive program or written degree program.

Verification of completion of 7,000 hours of patient counseling experience performing the 8 practice dimensions as a substance abuse counselor, supervised as described in form #2749, within 5 years immediately preceding the date of application. The 7,000 hours shall include 2,000 hours in direct, face-to-face substance abuse patient counseling. Experience in excess of 40 hours per week or 2,000 hours per year will not be accepted.

Educational equivalencies – clinical substance abuse counselor. Successful completion of education resulting in a degree approved by the department in a field with an addiction emphasis or concentration from a clinical program approved by the department in a field that may be used to satisfy, in part, the experience requirement. The possession of the following degrees shall be exchanged for experience at the following rate:"

- An associate degree will equal 1,000 hours of supervised experience.
- A bachelor degree will equal 2,000 hours of supervised experience.
- A master or doctoral degree will equal 4,000 hours of supervised experience.

State of Wisconsin Department of Regulation and Licensing (see below link for further details)

<https://dsps.wi.gov/Pages/Professions/SubstanceAbuseCounselor/Default.aspx>