

CUDCP-Preferred Predoctoral Competencies for Clinical Psychology

Overview

The Council of University Directors of Clinical Psychology (CUDCP) represents 179 member programs who provide doctoral education and training in clinical psychology that is consistent with scientist-practitioner and clinical science training models. CUDCP programs maintain an extremely strong commitment to excellence in doctoral education and training, aiming to produce psychologists who are competent to generate and integrate scientific and professional knowledge and skills to further psychological science, the professional practice of psychology, and human welfare.

The Predoctoral Competencies outlined in this document represent many of the qualities that CUDCP programs prefer applicants to have acquired prior to applying to their programs. These competencies, however, are neither necessary nor sufficient for admission into a specific CUDCP program. Instead, these competencies represent aspirational guidelines that are intended to make it clear what many CUDCP programs may seek in competitive applicants. Applicants are encouraged to not only examine this document, but also to examine the admissions criteria of specific CUDCP programs before applying.

Knowledge Competencies

Predoctoral knowledge competencies reflect foundational knowledge that is specific to the discipline of clinical psychology. The predoctoral knowledge competencies outlined in this section are consistent with the Discipline Specific Knowledge competencies identified by the American Psychological Association for doctoral education in health service psychology, including clinical psychology. Specifically, these predoctoral knowledge competencies provide a base of knowledge in scientific content and ways of knowing in psychology.

The predoctoral knowledge competencies outlined below are typically attained through coursework at the undergraduate level, although they can also be obtained at the post-baccalaureate or master's level. Please note that while the titles of specific courses may vary from the competencies, the content of the courses is what determines if the knowledge competencies are attained. Evidence that knowledge competencies are attained are typically evaluated through grades in specific courses. Some programs may also be willing to consider evidence of knowledge competencies outside of formal coursework (e.g., research or work experience) or through standardized assessments (e.g., subject or major field tests).

Specific predoctoral knowledge competencies for clinical psychology include the following:

- Foundational knowledge in the discipline of psychology and clinical psychology, including:
 - Introduction to Psychology
 - History and Systems of Psychology
 - Psychopathology

- Foundational knowledge in the psychological sciences, including:

- Affective Bases of Behavior
- Biological Bases of Behavior
- Cognitive Bases of Behavior (e.g., Perception, Psychology of Language, Cognition and Learning)
- Developmental Psychology
- Social Psychology
- Foundational knowledge in psychological research:
 - Statistics
 - Research Methods

Research Skill Competencies

Predocutorial research skill competencies provide a basis for students to be successful in meeting the research requirements of CUDCP programs. Although CUDCP programs vary in the relative emphasis they place on research, all CUDCP programs are focused on their students generating and integrating scientific and professional knowledge and skills to further psychological science and practice. As such, evidence of research *skills*, above and beyond foundational knowledge in psychological research is often required for applicants to be competitive for CUDCP programs. Many CUDCP programs prefer applicants to have research skills that will directly translate to skills that they will use in conducting research during the doctoral program.

One of the best ways to develop predocutorial research skill competencies is by directly engaging in research experiences. Research experiences can include any of the following:

- A post-baccalaureate research assistant or coordinator position
- Supervised research experience with undergraduate faculty
- Supervised research experience with graduate faculty (e.g., master's program)
- A senior honors thesis

The specific research skill competencies that applicants will vary by the intensity, duration, and depth of their research experience. For example, a research experience limited to a few summer months and involving only a few hours per week will develop a more limited set of research skill competencies than that of a multiyear, fulltime post-baccalaureate research coordinator position in which the applicant participates in all components of the study. For many programs, the most competitive applicants will have basic (e.g., recruiting, scheduling & consenting participants; data entry; literature reviews) as well as advanced (e.g., conception and design, data analysis, scientific writing) research skill competencies.

Some applicants may not have access to the research experiences described above. For example, some undergraduate institutions may have a limited number of faculty that provide opportunities to engage in research, or recent graduates cannot afford to take on lower paying post-baccalaureate research positions. Nonetheless, many students have been able to find rewarding opportunities that foster research skills by looking to their communities and other institutions. When traditional research experiences are unavailable, applicants to CUDCP programs should consider other opportunities that may help to foster research or related competencies, such as:

- Research opportunities in related disciplines (e.g., medicine, neuroscience, public health, sociology)
- Engagement in community organizations
- Engagement in social justice activities
- Involvement in advocacy
- Leadership in academic, social, and sports organizations

Clinical Skill Competencies

CUDCP programs do **not** expect applicants to our programs to have clinical experiences that are similar to that of clinical psychologists, such as conducting psychological assessments or interventions. Instead, CUDCP programs encourage applicants to obtain some experience or exposure to populations for which you are likely to work with as a clinical psychologist, such as those suffering from mental health conditions. It is critical that applicants know that they can be comfortable working with people suffering from mental health conditions. For most programs, it is not critical, necessary, or even desirable to have therapeutic or assessment experience.

Applicants may obtain clinical exposure in numerous ways, such as through clinical research, volunteering with hotlines, support groups, agencies or clinics, or mental health advocacy organizations.

Professional Values and Attitudes

Consistent with the profession-wide competencies of clinical psychology, applicants will be competitive to CUDCP programs if they demonstrate the following values and attitudes:

- Sensitivity towards diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice
- An orientation towards considering ethics and the law in decision-making
- Scientific mindedness that balances multiple approaches to knowing and discovery
- An analytic mindset
- Intellectual curiosity
- Independence
- Ingenuity, ability to innovate

Those who are considering applying to any program in health service psychology need to be aware that faculty, training staff, supervisors, and administrators of training programs have a professional, ethical, and potentially legal obligation to:

- Establish criteria and methods through which aspects of competence other than, and in addition to, a student-trainee's knowledge or skills may be assessed (including, but not limited to, emotional stability and well-being, interpersonal skills, professional development, and personal fitness for practice)
- Ensure—insofar as possible—that student-trainees who complete the program are competent to manage future relationships (e.g., client, collegial, professional, public, scholarly, supervisory, teaching) in an effective and appropriate manner.

Because of this commitment, and within the parameters of administrative authority, the program, faculty, training staff, supervisors, and administrators strive not to advance, recommend, or graduate students or trainees with demonstrable problems (e.g., cognitive, emotional, psychological, interpersonal, technical, and ethical) that may interfere with professional competence to other programs, the profession, employers, or the public at large.

As such, within a developmental framework, and with due regard for the inherent power difference between students and faculty, students and trainees should know that faculty, training staff, and supervisors will evaluate competence in areas other than, and in addition to, coursework, seminars, scholarship, comprehensive/qualifying examinations, or related program requirements. These evaluative areas include, but are not limited to, demonstration of sufficient:

- Interpersonal and professional competence (e.g., the ways in which student-trainees relate to clients, peers, faculty, allied professionals, the public, and individuals from diverse backgrounds or histories)
- Self-awareness, self-reflection, and self-evaluation (e.g., knowledge of the content and potential impact of one's own beliefs and values on clients, peers, faculty, allied professionals, the public, and individuals from diverse backgrounds or histories)
- Openness to processes of supervision (e.g., the ability and willingness to explore issues that either interfere with the appropriate provision of care or impede professional development or functioning)
- Resolution of issues or problems that interfere with professional development or functioning in a satisfactory manner.