Thinking about Graduate Study in Clinical or Counseling Psychology?

The undergraduate major in Psychology provides students with a comprehensive education in the field. From this breadth of understanding, each student may customize his or her degree by identifying a special area of interest within psychology. In addition to the courses required for the Psychology Major, the following is a list of upper division courses to consider.

The courses listed here are especially relevant to career development in Clinical or Counseling Psychology. While your major requirements take precedence, if you are interested in a career in the mental health profession, we suggest you consider additional choices from the options provided below.

For more information about your Major in Psychology at SJSU visit the web at: [http://www.sjsu.edu/psych/Undergraduates/](http://www.sjsu.edu/psych/Undergraduates/)

About Clinical Psychology

The area of clinical psychology is concerned with the understanding and treatment of psychological distress. Clinical and counseling psychologists work in the field of mental health to assess and treat people with psychological problems. There are many ways to engage in the mental health profession as it relates to clinical psychology. With an undergraduate degree in psychology individuals can be involved in some administration tasks in mental health, and with additional certification, engage in limited delivery of therapeutic services as a paraprofessional (e.g., as a substance abuse counselor) in a variety of community health agency settings.

To practice psychotherapy requires a license (e.g., Marriage and Family Therapist, Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor, or licensed Psychologist). Getting a license allows one to practice therapy independently in California, but you need to have a graduate degree and the necessary hours of experience after that to get licensed.

Different graduate degrees (degrees earned after you complete your undergraduate degree) allow individuals to become eligible for these licenses. These mental health professionals and clinical scientists may act as therapists for people experiencing normal psychological crises (e.g., grief) or for individuals, couples, and families suffering from chronic psychological disorders. Some clinical psychologists are generalists who work with a wide variety of populations, while others work with specific groups like children, the elderly, or those with specific disorders (e.g., depression, post traumatic stress disorder, or schizophrenia). These professionals may be found working in academic settings, hospitals, community health centers, or in private practice.

While clinical psychology overlaps with other professions, it is unique in that its focus is typically on alleviating human suffering and working with people with problems. This is in contrast to a focus on social welfare and helping connect individuals to essential community resources as found in a social work graduate program (leading to becoming a Licensed Clinical Social Worker) or a school counselor who works primarily with individuals through their academic career to effective adjust to education and make effective and positive choices for their vocation.

Coursework Considerations for Clinical Preparation

The following courses are recommended for those individuals seeking a career in fields related to clinical psychology. Remember, students must take the courses required for their major. These courses can be taken as electives and are encouraged as options for additional coursework:

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<tr>
<th>PSYC 110 Abnormal Psychology</th>
<th>PSYC 139 Psychology of Personality</th>
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<tr>
<td>PSYC 117 Psychological Tests and Measures</td>
<td>PSYC 142 Personality and Emotional Probs of Children</td>
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PSYC 125 Group Dynamics  
PSYC 120 Research Methods  
PSYC 126 Drugs, Brain, and Behavior

PSYC 160 Introduction to Clinical Psychology  
PSYC 165 Theories and Methods of Counseling

For individuals interested in pursuing graduate study in psychology (see below), extra coursework may be required by some universities. Every graduate program is slightly different and has different requirements for the prerequisite coursework needed to get into their graduate program. You are encouraged to look at the admission criteria of graduate schools you may wish to attend in advance so that you can take those prerequisite courses while you are a student here at SJSU. With each area of graduate study described below, we suggest one or more specific courses that students consider taking in addition to those listed above.

**Minors Relevant to Clinical Psychology**

The Psychology Major requires you to choose a minor. The following areas are those that would provide additional education and training for Clinical Psychology:

- Atypical Child Studies
- Biology
- Child Development
- Communication Studies
- Criminal Justice Administration
- Education-Instructional Technology
- Gerontology
- Health Science
- Philosophy
- Recreation
- Social Work
- Sociology

**Graduate Degrees Related to Clinical Psychology**

For information about applying for graduate study go to: [http://www.sjsu.edu/people/glenn.callaghan/grad_school/](http://www.sjsu.edu/people/glenn.callaghan/grad_school/)

**Masters degrees in Clinical or Counseling Psychology**

These Masters degrees lead to state licensure as Marriage Family Therapists (MFTs) or Licensed Professional Clinical Counselors (LPCCs) in California and other states. Licensure requires a minimum of 2 years of graduate training and usually around 2 years of supervised clinical practice. A Masters degree is best for those who wish to provide direct therapy services to individuals, couples, and families in community agencies and who do not wish to go on to become researchers or professors.

We strongly recommend that undergraduate students interested in a masters degree in clinical psychology and later licensure as an MFT, LPCC (or other health professional) complete fieldwork study to obtain professionally supervised experience serving clinical populations. Students interested in completing a fieldwork course should contact a faculty member and enroll in: PSYC 186, Fieldwork Studies.

**The Clinical Masters Degree (MS) in Psychology at San Jose State**

San Jose State University offers an excellent Masters degree in Clinical Psychology (the MS in Clinical Psychology). The MS program in Clinical Psychology is an excellent choice for those who wish to become Masters-level practitioners of psychotherapy and are seeking licensure as either an MFT or LPCC. The MS in Clinical Psychology at SJSU is renowned for its excellent preparation of graduates for clinical practice. This is not a program that prepares students for pursuing a doctorate in Clinical Psychology (Ph.D.), as it does not provide the direct research experience necessary to get into that type of program (i.e., publishing research studies while a graduate student).
Students interested in the MS in Clinical Psychology program at SJSU are required to take the following courses:

- **General or Introduction to Psychology (PSYC 1)**
- **Elementary Statistics (STAT 95)**
- **Introduction to Research Methods (PSYC 18 or PSYC 120)**
- **Psychobiology, neuropsychology or an equivalent (PSYC 30)**
  (Each of the above four courses may be taken at the community college or university level and may be lower division courses)
- **Abnormal Psychology (PSYC 110)**
- **Clinical Psychology or Theory and Methods of Counseling (PSYC 160 or 165)**

For more information about the MS in Clinical Psychology at SJSU visit the web at: [http://www.sjsu.edu/psych/Graduates/clinicalpsych/index.html](http://www.sjsu.edu/psych/Graduates/clinicalpsych/index.html)

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**Doctoral degrees (Ph.D.s) in Clinical or Counseling Psychology**

Doctoral degrees prepare graduates for careers in research, teaching, and administration in hospitals, community agencies, and academics. Ph.D.s in Clinical Psychology can become licensed Psychologists and provide psychotherapy services, but they tend to focus more on research than practice. Professors, health care outcome researchers, treatment program designers and evaluators, and clinical scientists often have Ph.D.s in Clinical or Counseling Psychology.

A Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology focuses on empirical research of more severe psychopathology while a doctorate in Counseling Psychology focuses typically more on persons with adjustment problems and problems normally encountered in the life span rather than on persons suffering from psychological disorders. Individuals with a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology sometimes go on to specialize in forensic psychology (psychology’s interface with the legal system) and neuropsychology (a focus on the relation of neuroscience in clinical settings).

Additional coursework in statistics and research methods are highly recommended for those pursuing research-oriented graduate degrees (such as a PhD or MA in general or experimental psychology). It is also highly recommended that students work with a faculty member in his or her research lab to provide the experience and training necessary for this type of graduate study. We recommend the following courses for this career path:

- **PSYC 120A Advanced Research Methods**
- **STAT 115 Intermediate Statistics**
- **STAT 125 Analysis of Variance**

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**The Masters in Experimental or General Psychology (MA) at San Jose State.** San Jose State University does not offer a Ph.D. degree. However, many students are now obtaining a Masters degree in Psychology as preparation for their doctoral training and to increase the likelihood of getting into a Ph.D. program. The most appropriate Masters degree for preparation to go on for a Ph.D. in clinical Psychology is an MA program in Experimental or General Psychology.

For more information about the MA in General Psychology at SJSU visit: [http://www.sjsu.edu/psych/Graduates/experimentalpsych/index.html](http://www.sjsu.edu/psych/Graduates/experimentalpsych/index.html)

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**The Doctor of Psychology (Psy.D.) degree in Clinical or Counseling Psychology**

There is a third graduate study option for students interested in clinical psychology. The Psychology Doctorate (Psy.D.) provides students with doctoral level training without an emphasis on creating a career devoted to conducting empirical research. Private and free-standing professional schools offer these degrees. Tuition tends to be more expensive at these schools because they are not typically associated with state funded universities. Individuals who earned a Masters in
Clinical or Counseling Psychology (MS degrees) sometimes pursue the Psy.D. after their MS degree. The Psy.D. is appropriate for those who wish to provide direct therapy services to individuals, couples, and families in community agencies. Individuals who earn a Psy.D. do not go on to careers in academics or research, as the training is more focused on clinical practice.

Professionals who deliver psychological services (e.g., psychotherapists) are not required to have a doctorate (i.e., Psy.D. or Ph.D.) in California. One can do this work with a master’s degree.

Students should make several important considerations before applying to a Psy.D. program concerning marketability of their degree and current status of accreditation of the Psy.D. program to which they apply. With respect to accreditation, some Psy.D. programs lose and then regain their status of accreditation by the APA on an on-going basis. These issues requires thought and investigation on the part of the applicant to be certain that the programs to which they apply will meet their immediate and longer term career goals.

Suggestions for those students interested in pursuing a Psy.D. are similar to those for MS in Clinical Psychology graduate applicants.

**Get Involved and Learn More about Clinical Psychology**

Be sure to talk to undergraduate faculty advisors and other faculty members in the Department of Psychology about your interests. They may have some good ideas about how to pursue your goals with your undergraduate degree. They may be able to suggest good people to talk with.

We encourage students who are interested in learning more about their major become involved in psychology at the local and national levels.

Become a student affiliate with national organizations here in the West and across the country. Student affiliates receive many of the benefits of professional members, but at a much more reduced rate!

Info on-line

Check out these links for information about different organizations that study, discuss, and have conferences on issues in clinical psychology.

[www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org) - American Psychological Association (APA)
[www.abct.org](http://www.abct.org) - Association for Behavior and Cognitive Therapies (ABCT)
[www.aps.org](http://www.aps.org) - American Psychological Society (APS)
[www.westernpsych.org](http://www.westernpsych.org) - Western Psychological Association (WPA)