

# Clinical Psychology M.A. Program

## Frequently Asked Questions

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Click on topic area links below

Choosing a Program and License(s) to Pursue	2
Admissions Topics	4
Employment and Financial Assistance during Program	6
Progressing through the Program Curriculum	7
Training Experiences while Completing Clinical Psychology M.A.	8
Post-Graduation Career and Educational Options	8
Transfer Topics	10

## Choosing a Program and License(s) to Pursue

### **1. What are the main differences between Clinical Psychology and Clinical Mental Health Counseling?**

Although roles and practices overlap, training in clinical psychology focuses more on treating individuals with psychopathology. Counseling traditionally focuses more on common issues that psychologically healthy individuals encounter, such as stress, grief, and vocational guidance, even though program names like “clinical mental health counseling” *sound* a lot like clinical psychology. Clinical psychology programs typically base training on psychological science, and are situated in departments alongside other *psychology* programs at universities. Conversely, counseling programs are typically situated within departments of *education*. Counseling programs can prepare students to pursue an LPC license (see answer 3 below), whereas our clinical psychology program allows students the choice of training toward an LPC or an LPA license, which some students may prefer (see answer 4 below). When choosing your preference, it may help to review programs’ specific curriculum and available practicum and internship opportunities and settings. For example, moving forward, both licenses (LPC and LPA) will require at least 60 hours of specific coursework. Also, you may find it informative to read about distinctions between clinical psychotherapy and counseling philosophies and practices, which is beyond the scope of this brief FAQ.

### **2. What are the main differences between Clinical Psychology and Marriage and Family Therapy?**

Clinical psychology tends to approach the conceptualization and treatment of problems of living from a different theoretical perspective than marriage and family therapy (MFT), with a greater focus on the role of each individual’s psychological functioning on the development and maintenance of psychopathology. Although both disciplines consider social and family environmental influences on behavior, MFT tends to place more emphasis on how relationships and family systems affect behavior than on the psychology of the individual. Also, someone who primarily wants to work with couples rather than individual clients might gravitate more toward MFT than clinical psychology.

### **3. How is the LMFT license different from LPC and LPA licenses? Would licensure as an LPC or LPA allow me to counsel couples and families, or provide a broader range of job opportunities than licensure as an LMFT?**

A person credentialed as a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) or Licensed Psychological Associate (LPA) will tend to have more flexibility as far as job opportunities, compared to those licensed as Marriage and Family Therapists (LMFT). LPCs and LPAs often work with individuals (adults and children), as well as couples and families. People licensed as LMFTs are allowed to treat individuals, but they typically specialize in working with couples or families. LPCs, LPAs, and LMFTs are permitted by their licensure to practice independently in Texas (that is, without supervision). It should

be noted that some marriage and family therapy students ultimately obtain both LMFT and LPC licensure in order to broaden their future employment opportunities. However, family therapy students may not be eligible to obtain an LPA based on specific course requirements of the Texas State Board of Examiners of Psychologists. If you are unsure about which program of study fits more closely with your interests, we encourage you to discuss the issue more thoroughly with community professionals from both disciplines.

#### **4. Why do students pursue an LPC vs. an LPA?**

Historically, many of our students have pursued licensure as an LPC (Licensed Professional Counselor) because in Texas, once full licensure is obtained, LPCs are able to practice independently, without a supervisor. Until 2017, in Texas, Licensed Psychological Associates (LPAs) were not allowed to practice independently and thus were only able to provide psychological services under the supervision of another professional (usually a psychologist). However, LPAs can now practice independently if they meet specific criteria (see 463.8 of the Texas Administrative Code for details). In general, students might pursue an LPA if their training and career interests align more closely with clinical psychology than with counseling (see item #1) and want their post-degree clinical hours to be supervised by a Licensed Psychologist (hours toward LPC must be supervised by a board-approved LPC Supervisor). Within our program, where one may pursue training toward either an LPA or LPC, students who pursue an LPA may be less interested in taking LPC-board-required courses in career counseling, addictions counseling, or family therapy, which allows students pursuing an LPA to take other courses. It should be noted that LPA and LPC licenses are administered by different boards (see answer #5) in Texas, and each have differing rules concerning post-graduation supervisor qualifications. Graduates' subjective reports have been that the exam for LPA is more challenging than the exam for LPC, and this may lead to the LPA being regarded more highly in the mental health field. Students can consider this question, but do not need to decide before coming into the program.

#### **5. Would I have a license after completing your program?**

No. The state of Texas (not individual universities) regulates the licensure of professions. Our program is constructed to provide students with the coursework and preliminary practical experience necessary to meet the academic requirements determined by the State of Texas to be necessary, in part, for licensure as either a Professional Counselor or a Psychological Associate (LPA). These credentials are awarded by the [Texas State Board of Examiners of Professional Counselors](#) (for LPCs) or the [Texas State Board of Examiners of Psychologists](#) (for LPAs). Both boards have additional requirements beyond academic coursework which must be met in order to obtain licensure (e.g., successfully passing an examination of knowledge of the discipline; completing a specified number of contact hours post-graduation under the supervision of a board-approved supervisor, etc.). We encourage you to read these board rules and requirements carefully before beginning your graduate study so that you are familiar with

steps necessary for licensure, if that is your goal. If you plan to practice in a state other than Texas, be aware that licensure laws differ by state and our curriculum may not meet other states' requirements. Thus, review the rules of the state in which you hope to practice so that you can plan accordingly.

**6. How do program graduates perform on licensing exams?**

Historically, our graduates consistently perform well on the exam required for LPA or LPC licensure.

**7. Is the Clinical Psychology M.A. program CACREP or APA accredited?**

No, only counseling programs are eligible for CACREP accreditation. Therefore, as a clinical psychology program, we are not CACREP accredited. The APA (American Psychological Association) has historically only accredited doctoral programs. Thus, M.A. programs such as ours cannot currently obtain APA accreditation. APA has been discussing M.A.-level accreditation, and our program would be interested in pursuing accreditation if that becomes a possibility. Also, the Clinical Psychology Master's program is affiliated with the Health Service Psychology Doctoral Program, which is APA-accredited. Clinical Psychology faculty teach in both programs, and Clinical Psychology students may take cross-listed courses with doctoral students.

## Admissions Topics

**1. Where can I find the instructions and materials needed to apply to the program?**

Application instructions and materials are linked to the Clinical Psychology master's program website.

**2. When can I apply?**

The admissions process happens once a year, beginning with the January deadline and finishing in mid-spring, after on-site applicant interviews. New cohorts typically begin in summer or fall, but not in spring.

**3. What are my chances of being admitted?**

Gaining admission to the program is competitive. In recent years, we have admitted between 15-20% of applicants after interviewing approximately 30% of those who apply. Due to program capacity limitations, we are only able to accept those who present the very strongest applications and interviews, meaning that some qualified applicants do not get accepted into the program.

**4. What are characteristics of students who are admitted and succeed in the program?**

Admitted students typically have had an undergraduate GPA of 3.4 or above and a combined Graduate Record Exam (GRE) score above 300. They typically have very strong letters of recommendation, usually from at least one or more professors or supervisors in a mental health-relevant setting. They often have some experience volunteering or working in a setting relevant to applied mental health services (e.g., crisis line, behavioral technician, domestic violence shelter, psychotherapy clinical trial, etc.) and often have worked a year or more in a psychological research lab. Overall, they tend to have a record that demonstrates productivity, reliability, and a passion for the field. Also, successful students are compassionate, intellectually curious, and have strong interpersonal skills.

**5. What can one do to improve chances of being admitted?**

The admissions committee evaluates all application materials. This includes the prior academic records, prior experiences in settings relevant to clinical work, prior experiences in psychology or mental health research, and letters of recommendation. Currently, the GRE is not required for applications but can be included as an optional addition to an application. Thus, if certain indicators of an applicant's academic achievement and potential are not relative strengths (typical characteristics of students who are accepted), then it is important that other parts of the application indicate an extraordinary strength in some other area of performance (e.g., research experience, prior academic performance, clinical experience, and letters of recommendation). We encourage individuals to meet with their mentors (those they hope to provide letters of recommendation) to discuss ways to strengthen their applications. We do not have the resources to provide this guidance ourselves.

**6. How is the GRE used in the admissions process?**

Currently, the GRE is not required for applications but can be included as an optional addition to an application. GRE scores may be used to demonstrate an applicant's academic potential. There is no perfect predictor of graduate school success. The GRE is not perfect, but on average, it provides useful predictive information. It provides a single indicator on which an admissions committee can compare across applicants, which can be informative. Overall, the GRE may be used as one indicator among several that are considered during application review (e.g., GPA, relevant experiences, letters of recommendation, statement of purpose, research experience), as mentioned in #4 and #5 above. The program does not have a minimum GRE for an applicant to be considered for program admission.

**7. Can I meet with you?**

The program has only a few faculty, and it receives a large number of applications and even more inquiries. We are unable to meet with or provide detailed, individualized information to individuals either before or after the application process. However, we make the Student Handbook and this FAQ available on the website and encourage you to read them to learn more about the program. If, after reading all of our published program materials, you still have questions, you may email [clinicalschool@uhcl.edu](mailto:clinicalschool@uhcl.edu) or the program director. Also, note that competitive applicants will have an opportunity to talk with faculty during the admissions interview process. Lastly, you may be able to meet program faculty at a UHCL Open House events or other virtual events (see Clinical Psychology MA page: <https://www.uhcl.edu/academics/degrees/clinical-psychology-ma>). These events are posted on the UHCL website.

#### **8. If I am not admitted the first time, should I re-apply?**

We recommend that applicants who are not offered admission during a given admissions period consider the competitiveness of their application by comparing their performance to the criteria listed in Admissions Topics answer #4. Applicants with scores and experiences substantially lower than those typically admitted are unlikely to gain admission if they re-apply unless these scores/experiences have changed in the interim (e.g., they subsequently raise their scores, complete a year of research or clinical experience). We would encourage applicants to discuss their application and their approach to interviewing with a trusted mentor (e.g., one of those asked to write a letter of recommendation). Sometimes applicants can improve their applications by significantly increasing relevant experiences (e.g., volunteer work in a clinical setting) or by demonstrating excellence in some other area (e.g., research productivity, exceptional performance in a course taught by clinical psychology faculty) prior to re-applying.

Also, recognize that resource limitations make it impossible for the program to admit every candidate likely to be a successful graduate student. The program offers admission to those whose applications are comparatively strongest during each admission period, and some students with significant potential may still not be offered admission. If you fall into that category, we encourage you to read over all relevant FAQ answers, particularly other FAQ answers under the Admissions heading, and consider applying again in the future (see below).

## **Employment and Financial Assistance during the Program**

#### **1. Is it possible to be a part-time student in the program?**

Our students tend to enroll and remain full-time students throughout their time in the program. Students typically complete four courses each fall and spring semester, and two courses during the summer. Students who make a full-time commitment to completing the program have been more successful on average and have had a richer

experience in the program. Although completing the program as a part-time student is possible, it can be very challenging to stay on course and finish in a timely manner. For example, many courses are only offered once a year, and if a student is unable to complete a required prerequisite course in a given year, his or her progression through the program could be delayed by a full year.

**2. Are students able to work while enrolled in the program?**

The program is quite challenging for students, and therefore, full-time employment during the program is strongly discouraged. However, many students choose to maintain some form of part-time employment (less than 15 hours/week). Such an arrangement works best when the employment allows for flexible hours, particularly outside of typical business hours (8-5), when most program courses are offered. It is currently not possible to navigate the program without completing courses and practica during typical business hours.

**3. What financial aid, scholarships, assistantships, and stipends (if any) are available for the clinical psychology program?**

The program does not have unique avenues for financial compensation. Paid teaching assistantships are extremely rare and typically are not available to students as they are starting the program. The university offers some – but typically modest—opportunities for [financial aid](#) that many students receive. The university also offers some [scholarship opportunities](#), several of which are given to students in psychology and related fields. There are also sources of partial reimbursement for research-related expenses (e.g., professional conference travel) from the CPSA student organization and Hastings Family Fund.

## **Progressing through the Program Curriculum**

**1. How does student advising and mentoring work?**

Students are paired with an academic advisor at the start of the program. That person is a resource for the student throughout their time in the program. However, typically the majority of advising takes place in an orientation at the outset of the program. Students learn what courses to take when, and both the student and advisor sign off on a Candidate Plan of Study (CPS). Students receive a significant amount of informal individualized feedback and guidance from all members of the faculty as they progress in the program. There is no formal “mentor model.” However, students who are interested in research and/or pursuing doctoral studies often will align with a mentor (or co-mentors) who may have expertise in areas of research that overlap with their interests.

**2. May I complete program coursework online?**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, online course options have been offered. Outside of extraordinary circumstances, like COVID-19, the program does not typically offer online course options. The program's training experience is provided via in-class lectures, discussion, and learning of applied clinical skills in practica. We believe that the type of training we provide cannot be adequately provided through online means. Thus, very few of the courses required for our program are usually available online (2 out of 21). The vast majority of students have completed the program without ever taking online courses.

## **Training Experiences while Completing the Clinical Psychology M.A.**

### **1. What kinds of external practica (internships) are available and how are they arranged?**

After completing a two-semester internal practicum at the UHCL Psychological Services Clinic, students complete a two-semester external practicum (what we call an "internship"). Our program has established and maintains positive relationships with a broad array of internship sites in the greater Houston area which provide students with many options for extending their clinical training. Sites include traditional outpatient mental health clinics, medical settings, and correctional settings. We host a yearly internship fair, where students have the opportunity to learn about and develop contacts at internship sites. After a few semesters in the program, each student meets with the faculty Internship Coordinator for advising on how to arrange an internship that matches his or her interests.

### **2. Are there opportunities for specialization in particular areas (e.g., substance abuse, OCD, eating disorders)?**

Our program provides generalist clinical training, so a breadth of specialty areas are covered. In a two-year program, specialization is impossible without sacrificing breadth. Students wanting to set a foundation for specialization can join a research lab (see website for faculty research interests) and in some cases arrange for an external practicum (internship) in an area of particular interest.

### **3. Is it possible to get an Applied Behavior Analysis certification?**

It is possible to complete the clinical psychology program and complete requirements to earn an ABA certification, which allows you to sit for the BCBA exam. However, getting the certification requires at least another year in the program, beyond the typical two years required for the clinical program.

## **Post-Graduation Career and Educational Options**



**1. What kinds of jobs do clinical psychology program M.A. graduates land after they graduate?**

Our graduates succeed in a wide variety of settings with a diversity of client populations. About 80% choose to stay in the mental health field (those who do not typically remain in a career they had established prior to entering the program). Although some of our graduates leave the area, many prefer to find work in the greater Houston area. Below is a list of some of the Houston area agencies and sites where our graduates have found employment in recent years.

The Center for Success and Independence  
Cypress Creek Hospital  
Depelchin Children's Services  
Fort Bend Juvenile Probation  
Family Service Center of Galveston County  
Harris County Psychiatric Center  
Houston Eating Disorder Center  
Houston's Women's Center  
Innovative Alternatives  
McClellan OCD Institute/Houston  
MD Anderson Cancer Center  
The Montrose Center  
Shriners Hospitals for Children  
St. Joseph's Hospital  
Teen Health Center  
Texas Children's Hospital  
Texas Dept. of Criminal Justice  
University of Texas Center for Neurobehavioral Research on Addiction  
University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB)  
The Women's Home

**2. Do your students apply and get accepted into doctoral programs?**

Frequently, yes. Over the last decade, 15-20% of our students have chosen to apply for doctoral training. Around 90% of those who have devoted necessary time, aptitude, and energy into building a competitive application have been accepted into Ph.D. or Psy.D programs. This rate is very high considering that these doctoral programs typically accept only 4-8% of all individuals who apply. Some of the programs our students have been accepted to include:

University of California, San Diego-San Diego State Univ. Joint Doctoral Program  
Eastern Michigan University  
University of Houston (Main Campus) – Clinical Psychology Ph.D.  
University of Houston (Main Campus) – Counseling Psychology Ph.D.  
University of Houston-Clear Lake – Combined Clinical-School PsyD.  
University of Kansas

Kansas State University  
Louisiana State University  
University of Massachusetts, Boston  
University of Miami  
University of Missouri, Kansas City  
University of North Texas  
Oklahoma State University  
Penn State University  
Texas A & M University  
University of Rhode Island  
University of Texas Southwestern  
University of Texas School Psychology  
University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee  
Utah State University  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
West Virginia University  
Western Michigan University  
Wichita State University

**3. Is the UHCL Clinical Psychology M.A. a “feeder program” for the PsyD in Health Service Psychology?**

No. UHCL’s PsyD program accepts candidates post-bachelors and post-master’s degrees, and has its own separate application process and distinct curricular mission. Admissions to the PsyD program tends to be even more selective than admissions for the Clinical Psychology M.A. program. Moreover, the PsyD program focus and entrance requirements go beyond what is required in the M.A. program (which has been constructed to meet academic requirements for LPC or LPA licensure). M.A. students planning to apply to the PsyD program should consult the PsyD website for more details and may consider supplementing their curriculum with courses that might meet PsyD requirements if the student is later accepted into the PsyD program.

## **Transfer Topics**

**1. May I transfer in credits from another clinical psychology master’s program?**

It is possible to transfer credits, however this requires meeting particular criteria. First the student must have passed the course with an appropriate grade (B- or higher), and the course must closely align with learning objectives and practices of the program course it is intended to replace. The student must provide a transcript and detailed syllabus of the course they are requesting to transfer, so that faculty may review whether there is sufficient course content overlap. The request to transfer in credits ultimately must be approved by the UHCL Clinical Psychology M.A. program faculty. Requests for course transfers will be evaluated only after program admission, and the program is

unable to make statements about which classes may be approved prior to program enrollment.

**2. I am enrolled in a psychology masters' program at another university. Can I transfer into or take classes in the UHCL Clinical Psychology Program?**

A student may not simply transfer into our program. Our program is highly competitive, and the only way to be accepted to the program is to apply in late fall. Thus, in order for an individual to take classes or transfer in, she or he needs to first gain acceptance into the program. To graduate from the program a student would still need to complete the CPS required coursework for our program, even if they have completed a particular course at another university (unless approved by waiver as described in Transfer Topic 1).

**3. Do I have to be admitted to the Clinical Psychology Program to take classes taught by program faculty?**

In most cases, yes. However, there are a few courses taught by program faculty that can be applied to the clinical psychology master's degree if the student is later accepted into the program. Examples include several of the program's treatment electives (e.g., Pediatric Psychology, Development and Treatment of Mood and Anxiety Disorders).

**4. If I am a student in the UHCL General Psychology master's program or a "non-degree-seeking" graduate student, which classes would transfer into the clinical psychology program?**

There are about 9 classes in the General Psychology curriculum that will directly transfer if a student is admitted into our program (Career Counseling, Learning Principles, Biological Basis of Behavior, Experimental and Nonexperimental Research and Statistics, Human Growth and Development, and Therapy Electives such as Pediatric Psychology, Behavioral Medicine, and Development and Treatment of Mood and Anxiety Disorders). The university allows students to waive in up to 15 hours from the UHCL General Psychology curriculum (from the list above). The university allows non-degree-seeking students to complete up to 12 total hours, however these students can potentially be approved to enroll in additional hours if approval is obtained from the Associate Dean. When emailing the Associate Dean to seek this approval, be sure to copy the Chair of the Department of Psychological and Behavioral Health Sciences as well. (Note that non-degree-seeking status affects eligibility for financial aid). Alternatively, a student may enroll at UHCL as an undecided/undeclared graduate student and take some of the above-mentioned courses. If a student has already completed the above-mentioned classes prior to admission, it will still take at least 1.5 years to complete the rest of the clinical program.