

NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

Applying for Graduate School: Areas of Specialization in Psychology

The psychology major provides students with both a liberal arts education and the opportunity to explore specific areas of psychology in which they have special interests. Graduate education is a process of further refinement during which students become increasingly more proficient and knowledgeable in an area of psychological specialization. Following are descriptions of eight specialty areas in psychology that require graduate education.

Specialty Area	Description
CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY	<p>Clinical Psychology is a general practice and health service provider specialty in professional psychology. Clinical psychologists assess, diagnose, predict, prevent and treat psychopathology, mental disorders and other individual or group problems to improve behavior adjustment, adaptation, personal effectiveness and satisfaction.</p> <p>What distinguishes Clinical Psychology as a general practice specialty is the breadth of problems addressed and of populations served. Clinical Psychology, in research, education, training and practice, focuses on individual differences, abnormal behavior, and mental disorders and their prevention, and lifestyle enhancement.</p> <p>Preparation for entry into the specialty begins at the doctoral level and serves as a basis for advanced postdoctoral training in Clinical Psychology or in one or another of the advanced specialties that build on its knowledge and application bases. The substantive areas of basic psychology in which clinical psychologists must have both theoretical and scientific knowledge include the biological, social and cognitive/affective bases of behavior and individual differences.</p> <p>In addition, Clinical Psychology has a special focus on the areas of personality and its development and course, and psychopathology and its prevention and remediation. This emphasis includes the full span of psychopathological disorders and conditions, etiologies, environments, degrees of severity, developmental levels and the appropriate assessments, interventions and treatments that are associated with these conditions. Understanding of ethical principles, of diversity and of cultural context are integral components of the knowledge base of all aspects of Clinical Psychology.</p> <p>http://www.apa.org/ed/graduate/specialize/clinical.aspx</p>
COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGY	<p>Cognitive Psychology is the branch of psychology that studies mental processes, including how people think, perceive, remember and learn. As part of the larger field of cognitive science, this branch of psychology is related to other disciplines including neuroscience, philosophy and linguistics.</p> <p>The core focus of Cognitive Psychology is on how people acquire, process and store information. There are numerous practical applications for cognitive research, such as improving memory, increasing decision-making accuracy and structuring educational curricula to enhance learning.</p> <p>http://psychology.about.com/od/cognitivepsychology/f/cogpsych.htm</p>

COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY	<p>Counseling Psychology is a general practice and health service provider specialty in professional psychology. It focuses on personal and interpersonal functioning across the life span and on emotional, social, vocational, educational, health-related, developmental and organizational concerns.</p> <p>Counseling Psychology centers on typical or normal developmental issues as well as atypical or disordered development as it applies to human experience from individual, family, group, systems and organization perspectives. Counseling psychologists help people with physical, emotional and mental disorders improve well-being, alleviate distress and maladjustment, and resolve crises. In addition, practitioners in this professional specialty provide assessment, diagnosis and treatment of psychopathology.</p> <p>Building upon a core knowledge base of general psychology (i.e., the biological, cognitive/affective, social, and individual bases of behavior, history and systems of psychology) common to the other applied specialties within professional psychology, the competent and skillful practice of Counseling Psychology requires knowledge of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career development and vocational behavior; • Individual differences (including racial, cultural, gender, lifestyle and economic diversity); • Psychological measurement and principles of psychological/diagnostic and environmental assessment; • Social and organizational psychology; • Human life span development; • Consultation and supervision; • Psychopathology; • Learning (cognitive, behavioral); • Personality; • Methods of research and evaluation; • Individual and group interventions (counseling/psychotherapy); • Professional preparation for the specialty of Counseling Psychology occurs at the doctoral and postdoctoral level. <p>Within the context of life span development, counseling psychologists focus on healthy aspects and strengths of the client (individual, couple, family, group, system or organization), environmental/situational influences (including the context of cultural, gender and lifestyle issues) and the role of career and vocation on individual development and functioning.</p> <p>http://www.apa.org/ed/graduate/specialize/counseling.aspx</p>
DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY	<p>Developmental psychologists study the human growth and development that occurs throughout the entire lifespan. This includes not only physical development, but also cognitive, social, intellectual, perceptual, personality and emotional growth.</p> <p>The student of human development is important not only to psychology, but also to biology, anthropology, sociology, education and history. Developmental psychologists help us better understand how people change and grow and then apply this knowledge to helping us live up to our full potential.</p>

	<p>The specific tasks performed by developmental psychologists may vary somewhat based on the specialty area in which they work. Some developmental psychologists focus on working with a specific population, such as developmentally delayed children. Others specialize in studying a particular age range such as adolescence or old age.</p> <p>Some of the tasks that a developmental Psychologist might do include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluating children to determine if they have a developmental disability; • Investigating how language skills are acquired; • Studying how moral reasoning develops in children; • Exploring ways to help elderly individuals remain independent. <p>http://psychology.about.com/od/psychologycareerprofiles/a/developmental-psychologist.htm</p>
EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY	<p>Educational Psychology involves the study of how people learn, including topics such as student outcomes, the instructional process, individual differences in learning, gifted learners and learning disabilities.</p> <p>This branch of psychology involves not just the learning process of early childhood and adolescence, but includes the social, emotional and cognitive processes that are involved in learning throughout the entire lifespan. The field of Educational Psychology incorporates a number of other disciplines, including developmental psychology, behavioral psychology and cognitive psychology.</p> <p>http://psychology.about.com/od/educationalpsychology/f/educational-psychology.htm</p>
EXPERIMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY	<p>Experimental Psychology is an area of psychology that utilized scientific methods to research the mind and behavior. While students are often required to take experimental psychology courses during undergraduate and graduate school, you should really think of this subject as a methodology rather than a singular area within psychology. Many of these techniques are also used by other subfields of psychology to conduct research on everything from childhood development to social issues.</p> <p>http://psychology.about.com/od/researchmethods/a/awhat-is-experimental-psychology.htm</p>
INDUSTRIAL/ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY	<p>Industrial/Organizational Psychology is the branch of psychology that applies psychological theories and principles to organizations. Often referred to as I/O psychology, this field focuses on increasing workplace productivity and related issues such as the physical and mental well-being of employees. Industrial/organizational psychologists perform a wide variety of tasks, including studying worker attitudes and behavior, evaluating companies, and conducting leadership training. The overall goal of this field is to study and understand human behavior in the workplace.</p> <p>http://psychology.about.com/od/iopsychology/f/organizational.htm</p>

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY	<p>A school psychologist is a type of psychologist that works within the educational system to help children with emotional, social and academic issues. The goal of School Psychology is to collaborate with parents, teachers and student to promote a healthy learning environment that focuses on the needs of children.</p> <p>School Psychology is still a relatively young profession.</p> <p>School psychologists work with individual students and groups of students to deal with behavioral problems, academic difficulties, disabilities and other issues. They also work with teachers and parents to develop techniques to deal with home and classroom behavior. Other tasks include training students, parents and teachers about how to manage crisis situations and substance abuse problems.</p> <p>http://psychology.about.com/od/psychologycareerprofiles/p/schoopsych.htm</p>
SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY	<p>Social Psychology looks at a wide range of social topics, including group behavior, social perception, leadership, nonverbal behavior, conformity, aggression and prejudice. It is important to note that Social Psychology is not just about looking at social influences. Social perception and social interaction are also vital to understanding social behavior.</p> <p>http://psychology.about.com/od/socialpsychology/f/socialpsych.htm</p>

For further information on careers in psychology, visit the American Psychological Association's website at
<http://www.apa.org/students/student1.html>.