CUDCP Preferred Predoctoral Competencies for Clinical Psychology

Overview

The Council of University Directors of Clinical Psychology (CUDCP) represents 180 member programs that provide doctoral education and training in clinical psychology that is consistent with scientist-practitioner and clinical science training models. CUDCP programs maintain a very 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 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 – but not all – CUDCP programs seek in competitive applicants. Applicants are encouraged to examine not only this document but also 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. Further, applicants should consider their overall course experiences, rather than trying to link the specific competencies listed below to specific courses. In other words, an applicant may still have obtained these knowledge competencies without having course titles that neatly fit into the categories listed below. Finally, the knowledge competencies listed below can be attained from courses outside of psychology (e.g., policy, sociology, anthropology, community psychology, biological sciences, neuroscience).

Attainment of knowledge competencies is typically evaluated through grades in specific courses. Some programs may consider evidence of knowledge competencies outside of formal coursework (e.g., research or work experience) or through standardized assessments (e.g., Psychology GRE Subject Test). Further, although some CUDCP programs may require evidence of these predoctoral knowledge

competencies in their applicants, many CUDCP programs are flexible regarding how many of these content areas are achieved by an applicant. CUDCP programs encourage applicants to have a well-rounded undergraduate experience, including courses in other sciences.

CUDCP programs also recognize that some applicants come to psychology after pursing a different major, degree, or career. The knowledge competencies stipulated below are therefore not intended to discourage qualified applicants *without* a psychology background from applying to CUDCP programs. Indeed, some of our best students had undergraduate degrees other than psychology! As with all the competencies outlined in this document, an applicant can still be competitive for CUDCP programs even without these knowledge competencies.

Given these caveats, specific predoctoral knowledge competencies for clinical psychology include the following:

- Foundational knowledge in the discipline of psychology and clinical psychology, including:
    - Introduction to Psychology
    - Psychopathology or Abnormal Psychology
    - History and Systems of Psychology
        - Although preferred, competency in this area is certainly **not** required, especially given that many undergraduate programs do not offer a course in this area.

- Foundational knowledge in the psychological sciences, including:
    - Affective Bases of Behavior (e.g., Psychology of Emotion, Human Emotion, Understanding Emotions, Affective Sciences)
    - Biological Bases of Behavior (e.g., Biological Psychology, Introduction to Neuropsychology/Neuroscience/Neurobiology)
    - Cognitive Bases of Behavior (e.g., Perception, Cognition and Learning)
    - Developmental Psychology (e.g., Child Development, Human Development, Lifespan Development)
    - Social Psychology (e.g., Introduction to Social Psychology, Social Psychology)

- Foundational knowledge in psychological research:
    - Statistics
    - Research Methods

Research Competencies

Predoctoral research 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 both generating and integrating scientific and professional knowledge and skills to further psychological science and practice. As such, evidence of research experience, interest, and skills, above and beyond foundational knowledge in psychological research, is typically required for applicants to be competitive for CUDCP programs. Many CUDCP programs prefer applicants to have research competencies and experiences that will directly translate to the research they will be conducting while in the doctoral program.

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

- Supervised research experience with an undergraduate faculty member(s)
- A senior honors thesis
- A post-baccalaureate research assistant or coordinator position
- Supervised research experience with master's level faculty member(s)

The specific research competencies that applicants will have may 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 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, experience with IRBs, scientific writing) research competencies. More generally, they will demonstrate an interest in and commitment to continuing to conduct research.

Some applicants may not have access to the research experiences described above. For example, some undergraduate institutions may have a limited number of faculty members who 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 competencies by looking to their communities and other institutions. Students are encouraged to find novel and alternative ways to develop their research competencies. For example, students may pursue research opportunities in related disciplines (e.g., medicine, neuroscience, public health, sociology), or engage with university or community organizations in ways that facilitate these competencies (e.g., program evaluation, performance improvement initiatives, managing databases).

Clinical Competencies

In contrast to research 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, most CUDCP programs encourage applicants to obtain some experience or exposure to populations for which they are likely to work as a clinical psychologist. It is critical that applicants know that they can be comfortable working with people with mental health conditions. Applicants may obtain clinical exposure in numerous ways, such as through clinical research, volunteering with hotlines, support groups, homeless shelters, agencies or clinics, schools, summer camps, or mental health advocacy organizations. Alternatively, some applicants may demonstrate readiness for clinical training via substantial experience working directly with a variety of people, such as through teaching or mentoring students.

It is important to note that CUDCP programs vary in the degree to which they value clinical experience. Some CUDCP programs may especially value clinical experience for applicants who had limited opportunities to develop their research competencies (e.g., limited undergraduate research opportunities, needing to work rather than volunteer). Other CUDCP programs, particularly those that

intend for their graduates to pursue research and teaching careers, may strongly favor research preparation over clinical experience in their applicants. Finally, other CUDCP programs may equally favor clinical and research experience in their applicants. As such, it is critical for applicants to understand the clinical-research balance of programs to which they are applying and the amount of clinical preparation programs desire in applicants.

Values, Attitudes, and Individual Characteristics

Consistent with the profession-wide competencies of clinical psychology, applicants who are competitive for CUDCP programs will demonstrate the following values, attitudes, and individual characteristics:

- An orientation towards considering ethics and the law in decision-making.
- Scientific mindedness that is open to diverse perspectives and viewpoints and balances multiple approaches to knowing and discovery while also critically evaluating those perspectives and viewpoints.
- Analytic thinking that integrates data and theory to solve problems.
- Intellectual and scientific curiosity.
- Self-driven, independent, and knowing when to take the initiative and when to seek assistance and guidance.
- Openness to diverse ideas and perspective; willingness to respectfully challenge dogma and orthodoxy.
- Ability and willingness to explore concerns that interfere with scientific production or the appropriate provision of care, and to be open to identifying and modifying personal qualities or characteristics that impede professional development or functioning or reduce responsiveness to feedback.
- Ingenuity, ability to innovate and think creatively and flexibly; adaptable.
- Effective interpersonal and collaborative skills in dyadic and group contexts, especially with individuals from diverse backgrounds, and with interdisciplinary or interprofessional teams.
- A growth mindset with a strong capacity for self-awareness, self-reflection, and self-evaluation with a strong orientation towards lifelong personal and professional development.
- Persistence and ability to sustain effort to achieve long-term goals.
- Emotional stability and well-being, capacity for stress tolerance.
- Leadership potential.

Competencies to Serve a Diverse Public

CUDCP programs typically seek students who will begin graduate school ready to develop the knowledge, skills, and values to serve a diverse public in research and clinical practice. For example, CUDCP programs are likely to be most interested in applicants who demonstrate the following competencies:

- Commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice.

- Awareness of, and commitment to addressing the potential impact of one's own beliefs, values, and personal and cultural biases on clients, peers, faculty, allied professionals, the public, and individuals from diverse backgrounds or histories.

- Openness to exploring, reflecting, and acting upon concerns related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice.

Applicants can obtain competencies to serve a diverse public in multiple ways. For example, participation in community organizations that serve diverse populations, involvement in advocacy, or engagement in social justice activities are just a few examples of how students can develop competencies in this area.