Planning Your Course Selections

Many students ask for assistance in planning their selection of supplementary clinical courses and in their selection of practicum experiences. The clinical program is designed to provide (a) solid generalist training in clinical psychology and (b) the basic knowledge and skills required for licensure as a psychologist. Through the selection of supplementary courses and clinical practica, students are able to tailor the program to best fit their academic interests and anticipated career path. Both the Clinical Program Director and the Coordinator of Practica and Internships are available to assist students with the questions about course and practica selection.

As part of the process of individually tailoring the program to their own needs, there are some general principles in course and practica selection that are important for all students to bear in mind. Students are encouraged to select a range of supplementary clinical courses in order to ensure a broad perspective on the nature of clinical psychology. Taking a selection of courses and practica that focus on different clinical skills and populations can provide the student with a good sense of the scope of the profession and options for subsequent training and practice. With this in mind, it is useful to remember that students can take more courses than the number required by the clinical program.

Breadth of knowledge and skills must be balanced with considerations about the types of courses and practica necessary for preparation for one's career path. Although maintaining flexibility is generally a good idea, it is also important to develop plans for one's intended career path. Optimally, this should begin in the second year in the program, and includes considerations such as research training and clinical knowledge and experience relevant to the types of services one wishes to provide following graduation from the program. Nonetheless, initial practica are intended to establish core foundational clinical skills rather than prepare a student for a particular professional profile.

By the end of the third year in the program, students should have a fairly clear sense of the kind of internship and initial post-graduation position they would like to have. This does not mean that a student must have a firm plan in mind to guide all decisions made in the graduate program. It does mean, however, that a student should decide on questions such as what major populations to work with (e.g., child, adolescent, couples, older adults) and what psychological service skills to develop (e.g., specific assessment/diagnostic skills, specific types of intervention skills, program consultation and evaluation skills). Keeping in mind both the importance of breadth of training and the need to develop a profile consistent with attaining an appropriate internship and career aspirations, courses should be selected and practica requested on the basis of these plans. Students wishing to develop a dual profile (e.g., child/family and adult) should anticipate that an extra year prior to internship will be required to attain the combination of practica required to achieve a dual profile. They will also need

to take courses in (a) child psychopathology and (b) interventions with children, adolescents, and families ideally by the end of their second year.

Beginning in second year, students meet at least annually with the Coordinator of Practica and Internships to discuss clinical training plans and the types of internships that are most appropriate to their interests and profile. These meetings provide opportunities to discuss changes in one's intended career path and to focus on the requirements for obtaining a good internship. Useful information on the process of applying to internships can be found at the Association of Psychology Postdoctoral and Internship Centers (APPIC) http://appic.org/Match/About-The-APPIC-Match. APPIC is the organization that oversees the internship match process.

Beyond the internship, though, we encourage students to think about the type of clinical work they want to do after graduation. The selection of courses and practica is also relevant to the process of registration as a psychologist. The requirements vary somewhat across provinces/territories https://cpa.ca/accreditation/ptlicensingrequirements/ . However, by virtue of the Mutual Recognition Agreement signed by all psychology regulatory bodies in Canada, there is agreement on a common core. Some provinces (e.g., Quebec) have additional requirements. Students should consult the regulatory body of psychology of the jurisdictions of interest to them for details.

In Ontario, all candidates for registration with the College of Psychologists of Ontario (CPO) must declare their competencies with respect to:
(1) areas of practice (clinical psychology, counselling psychology, school psychology, forensic/correctional psychology, clinical neuropsychology, health psychology, rehabilitation psychology, and industrial/organizational psychology);
(2) activities (assessment/evaluation, intervention/consultation, research, and teaching);
(3) client groups (children, adolescents, adults, couples, families, seniors, organizations).
Details on the definitions of these areas of practice can be found in Appendix B of the CPO Registration Guidelines for Psychologists http://www.cpo.on.ca/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=286 . The following excerpt from these guidelines gives a sense of the importance of academic preparation for the declaration of competence for registration.

How to Complete the Declaration of Competence

In completing the Declaration of Competence the candidate specifies which areas of practice, which activities and with which client groups they will be practising during supervised practice and also eventually in autonomous practice. The choice of which areas of practice and client groups to check off is based on both the candidate's academic preparation (and prior clinical experience in another jurisdiction if they have

it) and the types of services they will be providing during supervised practice. The candidate must be engaged in the identified practice area(s), activities and with the clients groups during supervised practice.

Activities and Services: It is mandatory to check off both Assessment/Evaluation and Intervention/Consultation for all areas of practice chosen. Research and Teaching should only be checked off if the candidate will be engaging in those activities during supervised practice.

Area(s) of Practice: The eight areas of practice are described in Appendix B of the Registration Guidelines.
Candidates should review these carefully prior to completing the Declaration of Competence. Normally, candidates who are newly graduated are not expected to check off more than two areas of practice, since it is not feasible for an entry level practitioner to gain sufficient breadth of experience in more than two areas during the one-year period of supervised practice. Only areas in which the candidate will actually be undertaking supervised practice and will gain sufficient exposure to reach readiness for autonomous practice should be checked off, regardless of the amount of experience there has been in a particular area to that point.
For example, if a candidate trained in both clinical psychology and clinical neuropsychology during the graduate degree(s), but will be practising only in the latter area during supervised practice, clinical psychology should not be checked off.

In deciding how much experience during the supervised practice period is sufficient, it will be important to consider the experience to that point. For example, if an individual's internship was mainly in clinical neuropsychology, with very little clinical psychology, but they had completed solid coursework in clinical psychology as well as several practica, and the proposed work in their supervised practice setting is 4 days per week clinical with one day per week neuropsychology, it will likely be appropriate to check off both clinical neuropsychology as well as clinical psychology, in light of the extensive internship experience.

It is also critical that candidates acquire broad experience in an area during supervised practice. It is not sufficient to work with a very narrow range of presenting problems (for example only sleep disorders or eating disorders in clinical psychology, or only traumatic brain injury in clinical neuropsychology), since at the oral examination candidates will be expected to demonstrate a reasonable breadth of knowledge in each of the areas of competence that are identified.

Client Groups: As with areas of competence, candidates should only check off those client groups to whom they will be providing direct service during supervised practice. For example, a person whose supervised practice will be taking place in elementary and secondary schools should check off children and adolescents, but not adults, since they will not be providing services directly to an adult population (although clearly they will

be interacting with the adult teachers and parents of their clients). Similarly, while someone whose supervised practice is in neuropsychology will obviously provide feedback and education to the families of some of their clients, unless they are trained in and will be conducting family therapy, they should not check off families as a client group.

We strongly encourage students to review requirements for registration, especially the requirements for declaring competencies. The appropriate selection of supplementary clinical courses and clinical training experiences (both practica and internship) are critical for developing competencies for registration. The period of supervised practice during the initial stage of registration is also central for declaring competencies, as the newly registered psychologist must be providing services consistent competency with his/her declared competencies (including areas of practice, activities and services, and various client groups). The CPO Registration Committee, in reviewing applications for registration, expects to see clear connections between an applicant's graduate courses, clinical training (practica and internship), post-graduation employment/professional activity, and declared competencies. For example, if an applicant declares competency in health psychology, it is essential that the person has taken one or more relevant courses, had training experiences with a range of problems and services relevant to health psychology, and is providing health psychology services during the supervised practice period. As another example, to declare competency in providing clinical and counselling psychology services to children, it is necessary to have relevant coursework and to have worked with children across a range of problem areas during practica and internship training. Simply having assessed 2 or 3 children and then provided treatment to these children will not be a sufficient basis on which to declare such competencies.

By virtue of the nature of the training received, students graduating from the University of Ottawa Clinical Psychology program should consider declaring competencies in both assessment/evaluation and intervention/consultation services, for both clinical psychology and counselling psychology. The broad nature of the required courses and clinical training in the program ensure that students have knowledge and skills relevant to these services and areas of practice. Students who are interested in declaring competency in other areas of practice should ensure that they have appropriate academic course and clinical experiences. In effect, whether a graduate of our program chooses to declare competencies in other services and in other areas of practice should be determined by three elements: supplementary clinical courses taken, specific elements of clinical training, and nature of post-graduation employment/professional service. Sometimes an applicant for registration indicates competencies in an area of practice that is necessary for their post-graduation employment, but for which they have little or no knowledge and skills. In such cases, the CPO Registration Committee will require the submission of a retraining plan to develop the necessary knowledge and skills as part of the supervised practice process.

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