

Masters of Science in Clinical Psychology Program (MSCP)

What is required for admission to the program?

The requirements are described in detail on our website. You don't need to have an undergraduate major in Psychology, but we feel you will be best prepared if you have had about 15 semester-hours in psychology, more or less. Some of these should be in the area of abnormal or clinical psychology. Experience of some sort in the mental health or social services field is important, too. We no longer require the GRE.

If I apply, will I automatically get in?

No. Admission to this program is competitive. Approximately 72 percent of applicants for fall 2001 were admitted. This may be very different than the experience you had as an undergraduate student.

Is this program right for me?

That depends on whether you are looking for what we have to offer. This is a program in clinical psychology — you will learn to become a clinical psychologist: a mental health professional who is able to assess and treat adults, children and adolescents. Technically, you will be called a Limited-License Psychologist (state law mandates that only doctorate-level psychologists call themselves "clinical psychologists"). However, you will still have what is called a wide scope of practice, allowing you to engage in the same professional activities as doctorate-level psychologists. The only difference between **master's-** and doctorate-level practice of psychology is that as long as you work in the field, you must seek supervision from a doctorate-level, fully licensed psychologist. The supervision requirement makes **good sense, as master's-**level psychologists do have less training and may encounter situations in which the guidance of doctorate-level clinicians is necessary. In addition, ongoing supervision furthers your training long after your last graduate-level course is finished. Even the doctorate-level faculty at Madonna University who are not required to seek consultation do so in order to provide their best work.

Is your program accredited by the American Psychological Association (APA)?

The APA only accredits doctorate programs, not master's programs. Though our program is not accredited by the APA, neither is any other master's program in clinical psychology. Madonna University as a whole is accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools and our department functions according to the standards established by that accrediting body.

What can I do with this degree?

Many things. Take a look at any Sunday Free Press or News classified employment section under the **headings therapist, psychologist and social worker and see how many jobs there are for master's-**level professionals (they often do not specify whether the candidate need be a psychologist or social worker). **The master's degree, in our view, is an up and coming way of entering the field. Graduate schools cannot turn out enough doctorate-level practitioners and such individuals, when they are available, are often too expensive for cost-cutting HMOs. Many of you may want to become therapists (we don't call our trainees "counselors," as those are usually schooled by Educational Psychology departments). Our training in therapy is based on a psychological approach, as opposed to social work or educational approaches. One implication of this approach is that you will be schooled in the use and interpretation of psychological tests; other mental health professionals do not receive training in testing. In addition, our theoretical orientation is contemporary psychoanalytic (though you will be introduced to and make use of other modalities as well). There are many misconceptions about what this means and it is critical that you understand what we mean by this, since knowing about our orientation is one important way of deciding whether this is the right program for you. If you wish to explore this further we can suggest several readings:**

Nancy McWilliams, "Psychodynamic Case Formulation"

Nancy McWilliams, "Psychoanalytic Diagnosis"

Stephen Mitchell and Margaret Black, "Freud and Beyond"

Susan Vaughn, "The Talking Cure"

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Willard Gaylin, "Talk is Not Enough"

What psychoanalytic does not necessarily mean is: quiet therapists never saying anything; cold or uninvolved therapists; extremely long therapies with no direction; or complete focus on the ancient works of Freud. A psychoanalytic approach consists of a disciplined clinical inquiry that focuses on the whole person: conscious and unconscious aspects of the person, cognitive and affective aspects of their functioning, difficulties within the self as well as difficulties in relating to others. The psychoanalytically-trained therapist tries to develop a close professional relationship with the client in which the therapist is able to provide a kind of support to the client not available in other relationships. The goal of such treatment is to also offer a form of deep emotional understanding that can help individuals make substantial changes in their lives and alleviate symptoms or self-destructive behavior problems. The psychoanalytic orientation of our program is one of its most central elements, and the majority of our faculty teaches and practice from this perspective. Our theoretical base, then, is not at all a trivial or incidental aspect of the training we offer. Thus you should be reasonably certain that this is something you will feel comfortable with and be able to embrace; if not, this program will not be a good fit for your interests.

What if I miss the admissions deadline?

Occasionally there are spaces available after the deadline. If so, we admit qualified students in the order that we receive their completed applications. To see if there are additional spaces, e-mail one of the program directors.

If I miss the deadline, can I just take some graduate level courses?

No, unless you already hold at least a master's degree in a mental health field and wish to enroll in one of the courses associated with the Certificate in Trauma Studies. We have designed the program so courses add to your knowledge in a synergistic way; taking a course here or there detracts from the training experience. Additionally, we do not permit students to begin the program in the middle of the year; all admitted students must start courses in September.

Does everybody get an interview?

No. Only those individuals who seem suitable for the program based on a review of the application file are invited in for an interview. We will contact you; do not call to schedule an interview.

What are you looking for in an applicant?

We look for signs of academic excellence based on grades (and we take into account the rigor of the institution in which you received those grades). The personal statement is also important, and we look for evidence that you have thought about why our program would be especially well suited for you. In other words, a generic statement written for another program isn't acceptable. But we are also interested in a **more elusive quality that might be called "psychological mindedness."** This entails the ability to understand an individual in a psychological way, using complex formulations without reference to narrow, **simplistic or "pop psychology" categories.** Psychological mindedness also consists of an ability to accurately empathize with the experience of another person and also **a capacity to quell one's own** discomfort in the face of what the patient brings up, in order to listen closely.

Masters of Science in Clinical Psychology Program (MSCP)**What happens in the interview?**

We determine whether the program is the right match for you. We sometimes learn that students who appear for the interview know next to nothing about the program and have done little to consider whether it might be suitable for them. This is a mistake, as it communicates a sense of not being interested in the specifics of the program and conveys a cavalier sense **that the student doesn't care enough about what he or she is pursuing to check it out fully.** We also try to see if the approach we take fits with the prospective **student's goals and temperament. Some students are well suited temperamentally for a psychoanalytic program.** Others might do better in a social work program or in a psychology program that takes a different approach. Some students apply to the program believing it will be right for them because they had good experiences at Madonna as undergraduates. While in general we can assume that these individuals have had a good education, it does not necessarily follow that this Madonna graduate program is for them. Furthermore, students who were undergraduates in our department often find our graduate program is quite different from their undergraduate experience: far more challenging, more technically oriented, etc.

What else goes on in an interview?

We will try to ascertain whether you have had successful experiences helping others. If you are deficient in this area, we may recommend you engage in some clinically-oriented fieldwork or take one of our undergraduate field experience courses as a condition of admission to the program. We also want to know something about you personally—are you well suited for dealing with people who are in great emotional **distress? In the psychoanalytic approach, we don't try to talk people out of their feelings, and so practitioners must be willing—and even eager—to sit with patients as they grow comfortable experiencing, expressing and tolerating strong feelings (including feelings they might have toward you as their therapist).** While it is helpful to have a background in psychology, in some circumstances the faculty is willing to consider admission for students who show considerable achievement in areas that complement training in psychology. Thus, those who have majored in English, nursing, hospice education, or other fields with a clinical or narrative component may be admitted.

What about the writing sample?

Either before or after your interview, you will be asked to write for about 45 minutes on a topic related to clinical psychology. We aren't looking for a lot of knowledge as much as we are looking for how well you organize and express your thoughts in writing. You will also be expected to bring a copy of a research paper you wrote as an undergraduate for the interviewer to review and place in your file.

What if I don't get in?

You will receive a letter notifying you that you were either admitted or rejected. We are unable to give specific feedback about deficiencies in applicants' files. We recommend you go over the admission criteria and think honestly about whether you really satisfied the requirements. If you have further questions, you may speak with the Dean of Graduate Studies, Dr. Edith Raleigh.

What if I do get in?

Congratulations! Please send one of the Program Directors a letter of acceptance letting us know you plan to study with us and whether your matriculation will be on a full- or part-time basis. Do this immediately, so that we can plan for the size of the **upcoming class. Register for your first term's courses as soon as possible.** If your background in statistics is deficient, you should either take a rigorous undergraduate stats course the summer prior to your enrollment in the program or plan to take our one-credit statistics workshop in addition to your other fall term courses. You will get a note alerting you to summer reading you may do to prepare for the fall term; we suggest that you begin this reading early, to give yourself time to fully digest it. We usually meet for a welcome gathering in the first week of courses.

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What if I receive a conditional admission?

This means that there is some weakness in your background that must be remedied before your acceptance to the program is complete. In some cases, it is a low undergraduate GPA. To have the condition removed, you must earn a GPA of 3.0 or higher in your first 9 semester hours of graduate course work. If it is another condition, such as gaining clinical experience, you should keep in touch with your advisor regarding what you are doing to satisfy the condition. Once you have done so, one of the Program Directors will notify the Graduate Office that the condition can be removed. Please note that most conditional offers of admission require that you fulfill the contingency (or contingencies) within a particular timeframe. We will expect you to assume responsibility for this without prompting by the faculty.

Can I switch from part time to full time and vice versa?

Yes. If you wish to do so, talk with one of the program directors. If you switch from part to full time, you may need to wait a year to take some courses, because you will not have finished prerequisites. When you have made this decision, send us a letter describing your change in status.

What can I expect in graduate school?

As you might imagine, graduate school is much more demanding than undergraduate education. You will likely have 50 to 100 pages of reading for each course each week, mostly from original sources rather than textbooks. Required papers are often longer and for some courses, multiple papers will be assigned. Material is presented much more quickly and often, the presentation is on a level that is far more intellectually complex. At least one course is presented completely online and other courses may have an online component. Beyond quantitative differences, there are significant qualitative differences. Students are expected to engage in much more independent analysis and synthesis of the material, as compared to undergraduate courses. Trainees will assume responsibility for patients and other clinical matters, without recourse to excuses. Faculty considers whether a student's classroom behavior is appropriately mature and ethical. Finally, "effort" alone is not sufficient: students must develop competence at the level required of a professional. In addition, clinical work makes powerful emotional demands on the student. No doubt your own anxieties and conflicts will be stirred. Sometimes certain patients or clinical situations will be quite trying or demanding. Since it is often uncomfortable for us to acknowledge some of these reactions, there may be times when students may instead feel an urge to blame others for the stress and strain of graduate school. While it may come to feel like the faculty or practicum supervisors are causing all the problems, it is important that competent clinicians look within themselves and recognize if and how their own personal discomforts and conflicts are contributing to their experience. For this reason, we strongly recommend that students become involved in their own psychoanalysis or psychoanalytic psychotherapy during their training. The program directors or faculty can provide referrals to skilled, experienced clinicians.

How important is my writing ability?

It is central. In addition to documenting your clinical work in a clear fashion to avoid exposure to liability risks and insure good care, you will be learning to write test reports in which the ability to describe a client and elucidate his or her central dynamics in writing is crucial. In addition, psychologists must think clearly and systematically about their clinical work. Good writing is a sign of clear and systematic thinking and thus is highly valued by faculty as a sign a student is maturing as a clinician.

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What role does Madonna University's Catholic heritage play in the curriculum?

The MSCP is a program that trains students in the application of scientific psychological ideas to the field of clinical psychology. The curriculum does not include direct references to Catholicism, Christianity, or theology. One does not need to be Christian or subscribe to any particular faith to study with us or do well in the program. Students will not receive training that will qualify them to be Christian therapists or to provide Christian counseling. Indeed, we are skeptical of therapists who hold themselves out as offering therapy combined with a religious perspective, believing that such therapists often unwittingly impose their own beliefs on **their patients and may not enlarge the patients' freedom to make their own choices. We do believe, however, that Madonna's commitment to Judeo-Christian humanistic values** infuses the program with our deep respect for the uniqueness and value of the individual, our awareness of the important spiritual aspects of our students and patients, and our commitment to providing the highest quality services for all individuals regardless of racial, ethnic or economic background. We also know that **Madonna's connection** with Catholicism and the Felician tradition makes this a very pleasant place to work and study; and we have found that faculty and administrators have an uncommon personal concern for their colleagues and students. There is also what to some might seem to be a surprising commitment to the freedom of ideas and a respect for intellectual inquiry.

What sort of practical experience will I get?

Students will complete 700 hours of clinical work during the course of three terms in a placement setting. This might be a social service agency, clinic, or group practice. The practicum is arranged in consultation with the Clinical Director of the program. We provide help in arranging placements, but it can be challenging to find the appropriate spot. We do our best to find a spot that fits with your clinical interests, **but entrance into a practicum is not guaranteed and is influenced by availability and the student's preferences.** We encourage students to take an active role in seeking a practicum site. While the practicum begins in May of the first year of full time study, it is a good idea to begin thinking early in your first term here about where you wish to work and with which populations. We encourage students — in consultation with the clinical director — to make active efforts to secure a good placement. Students in the past have identified agencies they wished to work in and made calls to set up interviews. One thing that distinguishes our program is that students attend a weekly seminar on campus with other students in placement. This provides additional clinical supervision, an opportunity to share experiences with other students, and the ability to connect what you are learning in placement with what you are being taught in the classroom.

Can I hold down a full time job in addition to being a student in this program?

Graduate school is not only an intellectually strenuous endeavor, it is physically challenging as well: hours of intense classroom learning, plus hours of reading and writing, plus the demands of the practicum placement, all add up to an experience that is invigorating but also tiring. We have found that at most, students can hold down part-time employment while enrolled in the MSCP, regardless of whether that enrollment is full time or part time. Additionally, if your work hours are not flexible, you may find it difficult, or even impossible, to schedule in courses and hours at your practicum placement. Virtually all placement sites will need you to be available when their patients need to be seen and when certain meetings occur; and each course is offered only once per year, in one time slot only.

What if I have further questions?

Is that really possible after reading this? Well, of course, and if that is the case please contact one of the program directors by phone or e-mail. We hope the information above has helped you learn about our program and contributed to your making a good decision about whether you would like to study with us.

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