

For Students Interested in the M.A. Degree as a Means to Enhance their Later Application for Doctoral Studies in Clinical Psychology

Steve Lisman (09/29/2000)

Often I receive questions from undergraduates about enrollment in an M.A. program as a step towards obtaining the Ph.D. in clinical psychology. When one is unsure about applying to a doctoral program, or when one's application for a doctoral program is declined, sometimes it could help to enroll in a strong M.A. program, but which one? In order to help undergraduates with such a decision, I queried colleagues on the listserv of the Society for Scientific Clinical Psychology (SSCP). Listserv members are typically graduate students and faculty at doctoral-level clinical psychology programs that identify their model of training as "scientist-practitioner" or "clinical scientist". Other members of the list are faculty at the M.A. programs that send many of their alumni to doctoral programs. What follows is my original question and the numerous responses I received. I hope you will find these helpful.

>Colleagues:

 About 3-4 years ago, I asked on this list for recommendations of schools with strong M.A. programs for prospective clinical grad students who, for various reasons, won't wind up in doctoral programs right away. I was looking for names of M.A. programs that send their alumni regularly to solid doctoral programs because the master's training includes excellent opportunities for research.

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> Well, can't locate the information anymore. This listserv sent me the name of an article in Prof Psychol from several years ago that actually listed such programs, and, in addition, colleagues sent me descriptions or names of at least 8-10 other programs.

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> Would you mind taking a moment to refresh my memory, and cite the reference if any of you still have it. I'll be talking to a few hundred undergrads next week about applications to grad school in clinical

>psychology, so one incentive for you if you are on the faculty of the kind of program I'm seeking, is that you might get some publicity.

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> I'll try to keep the information this time. Thanks.

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Steve Lisman (9/29/2000)

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The issue last arose on the sscplist in the spring of 1998. I believe the article to which you refer is:

Gordon, R.A. (1990). Research productivity in master's-level psychology programs. Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 21, 33-36.

[Note --- I have left a copy of this article in the undergraduate office of the department (S.A.L.)]

At that time, various list members also nominated a number of "good" MA clinical/counseling programs:

**Western Washington University
North Dakota State University
Allegheny (now MPC Hahnemann University)
University of Alaska-Anchorage
Cal State-Long Beach
West Virginia University
University of Texas-El Paso
Mankato State University (Minnesota)**

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Two schools offering solid research- based MAs are **North Dakota State U** and **Wake Forest U**.

Bob Klepac
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There is a good clinical M.S. program in Augusta, Georgia (**Augusta State University**) which is a terminal masters degree. There is also a fairly good program at **Wake Forest**.
-Colin

I am a doctoral student at **Yale**, and I believe our MA program is relatively new, thus I don't know about who goes on to doctoral programs. however, there is a very strong research component and an opportunity to get involved in excellet research programs. Lots more info at the www.yale.edu webpage.

-Matthew Nock, Department of Psychology
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I got my master's degree prior to pursuing my Ph.D. from **Connecticut College**, New London. The year that I got accepted into a Ph.D. program, all eight of my classmates also got accepted into reputable Ph.D. programs.

Dr. Sonia Suchday
Clinical Assistant Professor
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I'd like to recommend our M.A. clinical program at the **University of Texas at El Paso**. We have a strong research emphasis, and about 50% of our recent graduates have gone on to doctoral programs. Our department is particularly strong in research related to health psychology, or psychology and law.

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In response to your query, I believe we (at **Southwest Missouri State University**) have built a program which offers good opportunities to students who wish to move to doctoral programs. While it is true here that the 'easy' thesis route can still be had by less motivated students, a number of faculty have taken a very rigorous stance regarding to students' research education. These also happen to be the younger faculty members who teach all of the methods and assessment courses, the core of our curriculum. Actually, I believe some of our classes are tougher than those found in some doctoral programs.

A student that I am sending out for interviews this year is going with second authorship on a book chapter (in press) and an empirical article (in review), a conceptually and empirically sound thesis which tests a model for the effects of rapport in forensic child interviews, an APS poster, an AABT poster, an MPS (Midwest) poster, and excellent performance in some tough coursework. He is only in his second year and is about to begin data collection on his thesis. I expect him to be finished and defended before he goes out on interview. I also expect he will have a publishable study which is very citable when he is done. In fact, I am pretty excited about his study.

Every year we have maybe one of four or five that reaches this level. Our problems are that easier routes are available to those with less desire for academic success.

While we are not one of the most recognized M.A. programs, we are working for that distinction. Also, routes to doctoral programs are readily available here as we have some good connections to top notch doctoral programs. We just want to be considered as our biggest problem is always finding good students who actually want to succeed and understand it will take some effort.

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I can vouch for the "pre" clinical M.A. program at **Ball State University**--it served me well.

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By way of personal experience, I can recommend the terminal MA program in experimental psychology at **California State University, Fullerton** (<http://psych.fullerton.edu/>).

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I am responding to your note on SSCP about masters programs that prepare student for graduate school and are research-focused. Graduates of our MA clinical program primarily continue onto PhD programs, so based on our surveys we assume it prepares students well. We focus on an empirical model of applied psychology in which scientific decision making and theory is emphasized. We have some great scholars here (Harkness, Daleidan, Basso) who are extremely productive and involve students on their teams (as I do also). Our students are presenting at national conferences and getting published. We are small and friendly and support motivated researchers.

Elana Newman (**University of Tulsa**)

A friend forwarded your e-mail message about information on programs that have a track record of sending students to Ph.D. clinical programs. I am the director of the MA. program in Counseling Psychology here at **Assumption** and I think that our program may be of interest to your students.

We've put together an interesting masters program here and recently we've revamped the program so that students are more competitive for Ph.D. programs. Although the name of our program is Counseling Psychology, it's really a clinical program and the faculty are all licensed clinical psychologists (except for our experimental or developmental colleagues who teach key courses like developmental psych, research methods, social psychology). We've always sent students off to doctoral programs in clinical, but more often it's been Psy.D. programs rather than Ph.D. programs.

About 3 years ago we introduced a stronger message of the scientific basis of clinical work and we carved out a solid social learning model that emphasizes evidence-based interventions. At the same time, we converted our teaching assistant positions to graduate fellowships (research assistantships) and we offer financial aid to up to 14 students in the form of these fellowships. The fellows are directly involved in clinical research and this intensive experience has provided the kind of training that prepares our students well for Ph.D. programs because they have both the experience and interest in research. In the graduating class, we sent one student off to a Ph.D. program in California and another is taking some time off before going to a doctoral program, but accepted a job in a residential setting where her job description includes conducting research with this applied behavior analysis program. Other students are in the process of applying to Ph.D. programs, and I'm confident that a few will get into programs (and some students who have been out for a while are also planning to go on to a Ph.D. program).

Aside from me, the program is anchored by Peter Toscano (SUNY Stony Brook alum), Ed O'Reilly (SUNY Albany alum) and a part-time colleague from SUNY Stony Brook who's doing a Post-doc at the UMass Medical Center (one of Dan O'Leary's students).

Don't hesitate to pass my name and e-mail address or phone number along to students who may be interested.

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The MA programs we take good students from are **North Dakota, U of Minnesota Mankato, and Wake Forest**. Mankato in particular is an excellent behavioral program.

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Here at **Southern Methodist University** (a 9000 student private, nonsectarian, heavily endowed university 5 miles from downtown Dallas), we have a Master's Program in Clinical/Counseling psychology. The program is a 2-year, scientist-practitioner-based program that involves 48 hours of coursework plus a research-based thesis. The curriculum of the program allows one to be partially eligible to sit for the LPC exam in Texas (Licensed Professional Counselor -- the state's master's level license). Like all other LPC-based programs, students still need approximately one year of supervised practice to get sufficient hours to be allowed to sit for the exam. Our clinical faculty do research in marital violence and aggressive

behavior (myself), depression (Dr. Rick Ingram), and health psychology (Dr. Ephrem Fernandez, Dr. Nancy Hamilton). We expect to hire two additional clinical faculty in the next 2 years. The remaining 10 faculty will also supervise MA theses if appropriate (our other strengths are social and cognitive psych). We offer extensive coursework in psychological assessment and are grounded in a solidly empirical, cognitive-behavioral framework. For those students who wish to use the program as a springboard to a doctoral program, all of our faculty are research active, with numerous federal and foundation grants to support our research and graduate students. The small department in concert with the heavy research base of the faculty make for a huge array of publishing and presenting opportunities for our MA students. Other than the heat during the summer (!), Dallas is an excellent place to live, with a low cost of living, easy transportation (DFW airport is enormous), and a small city feel (even though Dallas is the 8th largest city in the US).

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As the new Graduate Coordinator here at **University of North Carolina-Wilmington**, I am trying to find some good applicants for next year, and I figure you might know some. I hope you can help by passing this along to interested students.

We offer a Master's in Psychology with one of two concentrations. The first is a General Concentration. Note that it is not General Clinical, but instead, is a program that emphasizes "stepping up" to doctoral level work in psychology through an intensive program of research and corecourses at the graduate level such as Physiological, Developmental, and Cognitive Psychology, Learning Principles and Research Methods. We have been quite successful in placing students from this concentration into doctoral programs around the country.

Our second concentration is for those wanting to go into clinical work at a masters level. The concentration emphasises research, assessment and treatment, with a specialization in work with substance abusers. Students coming out of this concentration are licence-eligible in North Carolina (NC licenses psychologists at both the master's and doctoral level) and all have been successful at finding jobs at County Mental Health Clinics, Drug Treatment Programs, Psychology Departments at State Correctional Facilities or in State Hospitals.

If you know of any promising undergraduates who would have an interest in our graduate program, please give them my e-mail address (below). Since I was a Binghamton student myself, I know you've got some good students there who might be a great fit for our program. An added benefit: They might also enjoy going to graduate school five miles from Wrightsville Beach, NC!

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