

Choosing Your Clinical Path

On April 29, 2021, the Psychology Department hosted a panel for undergraduate students to ask questions about careers and graduate programs in Clinical Psychology. On the panel was Andrea Cook (Ph.D), Hannah Raila (Ph.D.), and Anna Sapozhnikova (Ph.D.) who shared their experiences and perspectives around graduate programs and careers in Clinical Psychology.

A little about the Panelists

Andrea Cook is a licensed clinical psychologist (PSY30174) who has experience working with adults in a variety of settings, including: primary care medical clinic, partial hospitalization program, intensive outpatient program, and substance abuse clinic. She is currently a faculty member at the University of California, Santa Cruz and teaches Nutritional Psychology, Health Psychology, Clinical Psychology, and Abnormal Psychology. Her research work has focused on program development for integrated care programs and the effectiveness of functional medicine health coaches to improve clients health symptoms.

<https://drandreacook.com>

Hannah Raila is an assistant Teaching Professor at University of California, Santa Cruz, who is originally from outside of Boston. She has a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology and her career has consisted of a mix of teaching, research, and clinical work. Her research asks questions about connections between emotion (e.g., how happy we are) and cognition (e.g., what we pay attention to) in the context of psychopathology. While her clinical work has focused on providing cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) for anxiety, mood, and obsessive-compulsive disorders.

[Psychology | Hannah Raila, Ph.D.](#)

Anna Sapozhnikova is a licensed psychologist (PSY28601) specializing in Collaborative Psychological Assessment/Testing and Psychotherapy with younger and older adults as well as couples. In her work with clients, she provides a safe and collaborative environment that supports the often challenging work of learning more about oneself. Identifying strengths, conceptualizing difficulties, and developing strategies for making meaningful changes in one's life. She is currently a Psychologist at the Pacific Anxiety Group in the San Francisco Bay Area, an assessment supervisor at BrainLENS, and an adjunct professor at the University of San Francisco.

<http://drannasapo.com/>

<https://www.pacificanxietygroup.com/anna-sapozhnikova-phd>

Below are notes from event:

A lot of students are trying to decide what kind of clinical graduate degree to pursue. Could you talk about the differences between PsyD, Ph.D., and Master's degrees, like MFT or MSW programs, and the opportunities these degrees offer?

- Master's (MFT/MSW)
 - Training to become a practitioner in a variety of fields (mental health services, government, industry etc.)
 - Some masters programs can help you prepare for Ph.D. programs
 - However, you do not need a Master's degree before applying for a Ph.D./PsyD program
- PsyD
 - Complete in 4-5 years
 - Training for professional practice in Psychology (e.g., clinical counseling)
 - Lighter research than a Ph.D.
- Ph.D.
 - Complete in 5-6 years
 - Research focused, less clinical training
 - Training to become researcher in a particular area
 - Clinical programs also involve training to become a practitioner or licensed psychotherapist
 - Careers include academia, industry, and professional practice
- Working with clients individually can be done with just a Master's degree
- Doctoral advantage: management/administrative level & receiving benefits

How did you decide which clinical degree program to choose?

- One panelist stated the Ph.D. was the most flexible for them and included more opportunities such as research, teaching, and clinical work. Their financial situation was also something that they took into consideration. They mentioned that some Ph.D. programs have scholarships and stipends available for graduate students.

Are there other pathways to clinical careers you think students should know about, for instance school psychology programs or non-clinical degrees?

- If you are interested in a career that is not clinical, students can obtain a degree in School Psychology, which is the general practice of Health Service Psychology. It is concerned with children, youth, families, and the schooling process.
- With a Masters in Social Work/Marriage and Family Therapy, you can become a licensed therapist and see clients, but a Psychologist requires a different license that is only obtained with a PsyD or Ph.D.

Can you share some suggestions about when and how to prepare your graduate school applications?

- Take advantage of opportunities to get some kind of clinical contact work (this can be very helpful and look great on applications) and make sure to demonstrate that you know what clinical work means. It's valid for someone to touch on their own struggles and talk about how they have gone through therapy as well - don't be afraid to talk about your personal experiences (i.e., going to therapy) on your applications.

For many, it's overwhelming to try to decide which universities to apply to. How did you decide, and what advice would you give to students planning to apply?

- If you are planning to pursue a Ph.D. (research focused), remember to focus on the fact that you will be working with a specific professor, so focus on your research interest and not much on the school. It's very important to know the professors and their interests.
- PsyD and Masters programs are more based on the school (these are a bit less research-based - PsyD's still require research, just less than a Ph.D.). One big thing is to make sure it is an accredited program! Going to an accredited program helps with gaining hours/internships that might require accredited coursework.
- In the U.S. you are licensed by state, so it's important to complete your hours in the state that you are being licensed in. However, this doesn't necessarily mean you need to go to the school where you want to get licensed, since you may complete hours in a different state than where your school is located.

What was graduate school like for you? What were the best and most difficult parts?

- One of the difficult things about graduate school was attending a competitive research university. Clinical training was limited, but there was in depth training/supervision available which was great. In addition, being around smart and passionate people was definitely rewarding, yet intimidating at the same time.

For students who plan to gain clinical experience before applying to graduate school, what kind of experiences are most helpful for gaining admission to a clinical graduate program?

- Check out the field study program at UCSC, it is a great way to get hands on experience and explore possible career options within the field of Psychology!
- Unfortunately, there is not much clinical work one can do with a B.A. degree, clinical work often requires at least a Master's degree.
- Getting connected to clinical research studies can certainly help your chances in gaining admission, but it depends on the type of degree and graduate program.

If you are interested in applying to Graduate School in Clinical Psychology, panelist Hannah Raila suggests reviewing [Mitch's Uncensored Advice for Applying to Graduate School in Clinical Psychology](#)

How do you like your clinical work, for instance seeing clients?

- It's great for those who enjoy lots of change, since every client is so different! It's difficult, but there is so much support from other clinicians and great resources!

Some students worry about emotional burn-out or about getting too emotionally involved with clients. Is that something you've dealt with? If so, how have you managed that?

- It's very important to get support, talk about it, take vacation time, and make sure you are taking care of your own emotional feelings as well. It's important to take two perspectives: observing and connecting with clients. Remember: *Clients can only go as far as the therapist will let them.* If you are unconsciously hesitant to talk about certain areas clients are discussing due to your own similar unresolved issues, clients will be subliminally discouraged from talking about them too. It's also helpful to remember that you will be getting a lot of supervision and support (in graduate school), so you are not alone in the room during training sessions when you first begin and you have a lot of support from supervisors.

Financial stability is obviously important for career choices. Can you talk a little bit about the financial situation for clinical psychologists, and how that might vary by the kind of degree and work you have?

- One can make a comfortable living working as a Clinical Psychologist, however, the amount a psychologist makes varies. For example, typical hourly rates can range from \$200-300 in the Bay Area, but rates can look different in areas with less people and less people who are willing to seek out therapy. Someone with a Master's degree may get paid a little lower. However, more training or specialization can increase this amount and their hourly rates to be comparable to that of psychologists.

How did you decide on a theoretical orientation to use in your clinical work?

- There are a lot of different ways to understand people. Our panelists suggested that you should read as much as you can, try them on for yourself, look into research, and do work that is right for you and clients. It is important to remember that theoretical orientations will not be the right fit for everybody and that is more than okay.