

Value of a Master's Degree for Gaining Admission to Doctoral Programs in Psychology

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American Psychological Association-accredited clinical doctor of philosophy (PhD), clinical doctor of psychology (PsyD), counseling, and school psychology doctoral programs were surveyed to assess the importance placed on various admission criteria, including having a master's degree in clinical psychology. In addition, potential benefits of obtaining a master's degree before enrolling in a doctoral program were assessed. Results indicated that clinical PhD programs view a terminal master's degree significantly more negatively than do the other programs. Benefits for terminal master's degree holders included credit transfer and, for those pursuing a PsyD, a more positive view toward the PsyD degree by some academicians. Although all programs reported Graduate Record Examination combined scores, undergraduate grades, and letters of recommendation as clearly important criteria when making admissions decisions, differences were found across programs in the value placed on research experience, journal publication, and work and life experience.

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Table 1. Effect of Having a Master's Degree on an Applicant's Chances for Admission

Type of Program	Negative	Somewhat Negative	Neutral	Somewhat Positive	Positive
All programs ^a					
Good GPA/GRE	2.0	4.9	48.0	31.4	13.7
Mediocre GPA/GRE	15.7	6.9	49.0	22.5	5.9
Clinical PhD ^b					
Good GPA/GRE	3.4	3.4	67.2	20.7	5.2
Mediocre GPA/GRE	15.5	6.9	53.4	22.4	1.7
Clinical PsyD ^c					
Good GPA/GRE	0.0	0.0	16.7	58.3	25.0
Mediocre GPA/GRE	16.7	0.0	58.3	25.0	0.0
Counseling ^d					
Good GPA/GRE	0.0	6.3	25.0	43.8	25.0
Mediocre GPA/GRE	31.3	6.3	50.0	6.3	6.3
School ^e					
Good GPA/GRE	0.0	12.5	25.0	37.5	25.0
Mediocre GPA/GRE	37.5	6.3	18.8	31.3	6.3

Note. The values are percentages of programs responding in each category. GPA = grade point average; GRE = Graduate Record Examination; PhD = doctor of philosophy; PsyD = doctor of psychology.
^aN = 103. ^bn = 59. ^cn = 12. ^dn = 16.

Table 2. Ratings of the Importance of Various Admission Criteria Across Programs

Admission Criterion	Clinical PhD		Clinical PsyD		Counseling		School		F
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
GRE combined score	2.8	0.4	2.6	0.5	2.7	0.6	2.6	0.8	ns
GRE psychology test	2.0	0.8	2.3	1.0	1.6	0.8	1.8	0.8	ns
Research experience	2.7	0.6	1.8	0.9	2.5	0.5	2.3	0.7	9.4**
Journal publication	2.2	0.8	1.3	0.5	2.2	0.8	2.3	0.7	4.7*
Letters of recommendation	2.7	0.5	2.9	0.3	2.6	0.5	2.4	0.6	ns
Undergraduate grades	2.6	0.5	2.8	0.5	2.4	0.7	2.6	0.5	ns
Graduate grades	2.2	0.7	2.6	0.5	2.3	0.8	2.4	0.6	ns
Quality of the master's program	1.9	0.7	2.0	0.5	2.3	0.6	2.3	0.6	ns
Practicum experience	1.7	0.7	2.4	0.5	2.1	0.8	1.9	0.7	ns
Interview	2.3	0.8	2.6	0.7	2.6	0.6	2.5	0.6	ns
Work or life experience	1.6	0.6	2.5	0.5	2.1	0.8	2.1	0.7	8.3**

Note. Ratings were based on a 3-point scale ranging from 1 (less important) to 3 (more important). df = 3, 102. PhD = doctor of philosophy; PsyD = doctor of psychology; GRE = Graduate Record Examination.
 *p < .01. **p < .001.