Research Training in Clinical Psychology

Research training in Clinical Psychology begins immediately and continues throughout the student’s graduate career. Students in the clinical area fulfill a sequence of statistics and other coursework that provide an excellent foundation for their research careers. Among its various purposes, the clinical area’s proseminar is a forum for students to learn about the full range of research support at the University of Notre Dame, to brainstorm about new ideas, refine thinking and work in progress, and practice presentations of research findings.

There are four formal research projects that are required of all clinical-area students. Given the research emphasis of the program, however, it is expected that all students will be engaged actively in additional research with advisors and peers, on some of which they will take a lead role in developing, implementing, analyzing, and publishing the work. Thus, clinical-area students are expected to present original research at national conferences, and are encouraged to have three or more articles accepted for publication prior to graduation, with at least one article on which they are the principal author. Evaluations of student progress in part reflect these expectations.

1. With the support of faculty mentors and advisors, students must complete a First-Year Project (FYP). The FYP is presented initially to the clinical area at the end of the spring semester of the first year, and finally to the entire Department of Psychology at the beginning of the second year.

2. Students are required to propose their Master’s Thesis research project no later than March 1 of the second year, and to defend the completed project no later than December 1 of the third year. However, it is preferable to defend the thesis early in the summer after the second year, which allows for conferral of the MA degree in August, before beginning an Advanced Practicum. The Master’s project is an empirical study that can be an extension of the FYP or a new project, either a part of the students’ research with the mentor, or an independent project.

3. The written portion of the doctoral-candidacy examination (aka “prelims” and “comps”) consists of a review paper of theory and research. The process begins with the student submitting a topic proposal to a three-person faculty committee, informally known as the Prelim (Exam) Committee or Comps Committee, no later than May 1 of the third year. The paper follows the format and style of articles appearing in such journals as Psychological Bulletin, Psychological Review, or Clinical Psychology Review, and often provides the scholarly and empirical foundations for students’ doctoral dissertation. A primary goal of this requirement is for the student to publish the review paper in a visible and prestigious publication outlet, such as those listed above, although publication is not required to pass the examination. See the above link for more details.

4. Over the fourth and fifth years, students propose, conduct, and defend the doctoral dissertation. The meeting in which the student proposes and defends the dissertation topic officially constitutes the oral portion of the doctoral-candidacy examination, and students must be advanced to doctoral candidacy to apply for a clinical internship.
Therefore, the deadline for the dissertation proposal meeting is October 15th of the fifth year or 1 week before the student’s first application deadline, whichever is earlier. This deadline allows the Director of Clinical Training to certify that the student has completed the area’s requirements for applying for internship. It is highly desirable for students to complete the dissertation prior to going on internship. However, the formal deadline for successfully defending the doctoral dissertation is August 1 at the end of the sixth year, typically following completion of the clinical internship.

A great deal of research activity occurs in faculty-led laboratory teams on an ongoing basis. Because most teams include individuals at varying levels of training and competencies, clinical-area students have the opportunity to learn from fellow students and, as they become more advanced, clinical-area students often supervise and assist newer students.