

CHOOSING A GRADUATE SCHOOL IN HUMAN SERVICES



- ◆ "I Want to Help People."
- ◆ Deciding if a Human Services Career is Right for You
- ◆ Choosing Which Graduate Degree to Pursue
- ◆ The Admission Process:
 - Getting Started
 - Required Examinations
 - Application Essay
 - Letters of Recommendation
 - Interviewing
- ◆ Financial Considerations
- ◆ Questions?
- ◆ An Overview of Graduate Degrees in Human Services
- ◆ Resources for Those Interested in Human Service careers

"I Want to Help People."

You want to help people. That's great! But how? This handout is designed to introduce you to different human services career options and the graduate school programs that can help prepare you for them. Use it as a starting point for further research and exploration along with the CDO publication *Graduate and Professional Schools: Choosing and Applying* and other resources available in the CDO library and online.

Deciding if a Human Services Career is Right for You

Human services work varies greatly. It can include direct services with clients; administration of direct-service agencies; and social research, planning, and policymaking. While you are deciding whether to attend graduate school, it is important to determine what specific area of the field interests you most.

Personal qualities valuable in human services work, especially for direct-services positions, include sensitivity, compassion, patience, tact, a sense of humor, and flexibility. To determine if a human services career is right for you, begin by reflecting on your interests, values, skills, and lifestyle preferences. Consult the CDO for information on written and online self-assessment tools and feel free to discuss your thoughts and plans with a CDO counselor at any time.

To learn more about human services and decide if the field is right for you:

- Research the wide variety of human services career options in the CDO library and online. Some helpful resources and web sites are listed in the bibliography.
- Talk with graduate students in the field.
- Speak with professors who have human services degrees. They can offer you perspectives on the field, on the types of programs they chose, and on college teaching in the social sciences.
- Use the AlumNet database in the CDO to contact Smith graduates to talk to about their human services careers. If possible, observe their work environment and daily routines by scheduling informational interviews at their work sites. Talk to people with a variety of human services degrees and types of work experience.
- Explore the field. A paid or unpaid internship or short-term job is the best way to find out what human services careers are really like. Working with the homeless, staffing a hotline, or interning in a hospital, drug abuse program, prison, or battered women's shelter will give you a taste of human services work that's an important part of your graduate school preparation. Internships are typically quite flexible and can take place during the summer, semester, January interterm, or other break.

Choosing Which Graduate Degree to Pursue

Although your Smith degree can prepare you for an entry-level human services job, further training is usually required for career advancement. The chart toward the end of this handout compares several advanced degree programs in human services, and will help you decide which degree is appropriate for your career goals.

Other considerations to keep in mind:

- Decide what roles, types of clients, work environments, and societal issues interest you most, and look for graduate programs with a similar emphasis. Be sure you're comfortable with the theoretical orientation and teaching specialties of schools to which you apply.
 - Many programs specialize in preparing students for a particular type of career. They may train administrators, professors, clinicians, therapists, community organizers, case workers, group leaders, or policy makers. Even within a specialty there are several choices. For example, a program may
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train only individual, family, or group therapists, or it might use only psychodynamic theory or family systems theory.

- Some graduate programs admit students directly from college, but most prefer applicants who have already worked in the field.
- All programs combine "fieldwork" (time spent providing services directly to clients) with classroom study, but programs vary widely in the proportion of time given to each type of learning.
- Some human services positions require licenses. Types of licenses and requirements vary from state to state. If you plan to set up a private practice, you must achieve a certain level of licensing in order to collect third-party (insurance) payments.

The Admission Process

Getting Started

- *Peterson's Guide to Graduate Study*, available at the CDO, in Neilson Library, and online at www.petersons.com is a good way to get an overview of human services programs. In addition, the CDO has a variety of books about choosing graduate programs in psychology, clinical psychology, and counseling psychology as well as social work. Professional associations such as the American Psychological Association and the National Association of Social Workers are excellent sources of information as are professional journals such as *Social Work*, *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, and *Journal of Educational Psychology*.
- Study the web sites of schools that interest you and request or download catalogues, applications, and financial aid forms. Email or call the school with any questions you have about the school, its program, faculty, facilities, research activities, and career planning services. The more specific information you have, the more focused and effective your application will be.
- If possible, begin researching graduate schools while you're still at Smith so you can take any necessary undergraduate courses. Many schools prefer that applicants have five or six courses in the social and behavioral sciences. Applicants who have been out of school for several years should check each school's requirements, and see if their work experience can substitute for particular course work.
- Find out what additional preparation is required by the schools which interest you. Ph.D. programs in psychology sometimes prefer students who have conducted substantive research beyond the usual course requirements, while social work programs are often more interested in students' internships or work experiences with clients.
- Visit graduate schools, attend classes, and talk with current students and professors. Ask about graduate placement in the career area you've chosen.
- A good grade point average is important, especially when applying to schools of psychology. If your undergraduate record is not strong enough to get into the graduate program you want, audit or take a few courses at the school to sample the course work and build a reputation with the professors. Demonstrating your commitment and performance this way may ease your entrance into the formal graduate program later.
- Be sure the doctoral program you choose is accredited by the American Psychological Association. This makes it easier to qualify for the licensing examinations you take after completing your degree.

Required Examinations

Some graduate institutions don't require applicants to take exams. Those that do usually ask for either the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) or the Miller Analogies Test (MAT). Graduate programs in psychology may also require the GRE Subject Test in psychology. Complete information on registering for these tests is available in the CDO library or from:

Graduate Record Examination
Educational Testing Service
P.O. Box 6000
Princeton, NJ 08541
609-771-7670
www.gre.org

Miller Analogies Test
The Psychological Corporation
555 Academic Center
San Antonio, TX 78204
800-622-3231
www.tpcweb.com

The GRE general test and writing assessment (now offered only as computer-based tests) are given year-round at various national and worldwide sites. (The closest testing center to Smith is in East Longmeadow, MA.) The paper-based Subject Tests are offered in November, December, and April at nationwide test sites. The MAT is offered at more than 600 controlled testing centers nationwide on a schedule set by each center.

It is best to take exams during your junior year or in the fall of your senior year for entrance the following September. Alumnae should take the tests a year before they plan to enroll. The admission office of each school can tell you how important test scores are to their admission decisions.

To prepare for your admission tests, familiarize yourself with the exam's format and practice taking it online or by using a review book. "Prep" courses are costly but are another avenue for people who believe they need a structured method of review. Feel free to discuss your options with a CDO counselor.

Application Essay

Most schools want to know why you are interested in their program, what your academic and career goals are, and how these goals were shaped. Surprisingly, many students forget the obvious but important step of tailoring their essays to the *kind* of program to which they're applying.

Ideally, all applications discuss your research and your client-service experience, but the proportion of each varies with the kind of program. For example, applications to Ph.D. programs may need to stress your research, while applications to clinically-oriented programs (M.S.W. and Psy.D.) may emphasize your experience with clients. You can familiarize yourself with a school's orientation by reading the catalogue, by looking carefully at the application questions for clues as to what the school wants, and by talking to some of their graduates or current students. Always answer the questions asked.

In writing your essay, use the active voice and "speak" in a style which is natural for you. Emphasize your strengths as well as your interest and experience in the field. Feel free to share your essay draft with a CDO counselor, your professors, friends, family, and others who know you well to get as much feedback as you can.

Letters of Recommendation

Most applications ask for three letters of recommendation. If you're a recent graduate, recommendations from professors are most important, though you might also include someone who can write about your ability to interact with clients. Professors might discuss your ability to think, analyze, write, and contribute to the scholarship of the field. Recommendations from work or internship supervisors who have

seen you interacting with clients can emphasize your empathy, maturity, stability, and your interpersonal skills. Many students and alums keep their recommendations on file at the CDO. For further information about this service, contact the CDO.

Interviewing

Many human services graduate programs require an in-person or telephone interview. If you are asked to interview, make sure you know the school's program well, and emphasize the same qualities your essay stresses. Feel free to discuss your upcoming interview with a CDO counselor and to schedule a practice session.

Financial Considerations

Costs for graduate school are generally comparable to undergraduate fees, with public institutions in your home state being the least expensive. Check the "Funding" section in the CDO library for financial aid information, and consult the CDO web page's financial aid links as well.

There are four types of financial assistance:

1. Scholarships and fellowships are awards based on academic achievement. Each school has information on these.
2. Teaching and research assistantships are offered by many Ph.D. and Psy.D. programs. Students work with professors for a stipend or tuition remission.
3. You can borrow money to finance your education. The U.S. government has two major loan programs based on economic need: the Federal Stafford Loan and the Federal Perkins Loan; for these, applicants must submit a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Ask the schools' financial aid officers about qualifications and loan limits. Loans are also available from many schools themselves as well as from private lenders.
4. Work-study and other part-time jobs are offered by some schools, or you may want to find a part-time job nearby.

Applications for financial aid often have deadlines that precede the admission deadlines, so plan ahead. To help standardize the process, many schools use the Graduate and Professional School Financial Aid Service (GAPSFAS) to analyze their applicants' needs. Others use the Financial Aid Form (FAF) published by the College Scholarship Service. Ask the financial aid officers at each school about which forms to use.

As part of your research of human services degrees and careers, acquaint yourself with typical starting salaries in your field and geographic target areas as this may influence your repayment of student loans.

Questions?

For more information about human services careers, degree programs, and the application process, please feel free to meet with a CDO counselor, visit our library and web site, or to email your questions (www.smith.edu/cdo). Please let us know how we can help you.

Resources for Those Interested in Human Services Careers

Books in the CDO Library:

Days in the Lives of Social Workers: 50 Professionals Tell "Real-Life" Stories Social Work Practice, edited by Linda Grobman.

Getting In: A Step-by-Step Plan for Gaining Admission to Graduate School in Psychology, published by the American Psychological Association.

Graduate Admission Essays, by Donald Ascher.

Guide to Selecting and Applying to Master of Social Work Programs, by Jesus Reyes.

How to Write a Winning Personal Statement, by Richard Stelzer.

Insider's Guide to Graduate Programs in Clinical and Counseling Psychology, published by Guilford Press.

Peterson's Guides to Graduate Study.

The Social Worker's Internet Handbook, by Gary Grant and Linda Grobman.

Web Sites:

smith.edu/cdo Consult the graduate school information and the career research sections, especially human services, non-profit, and social work.

petersons.com The online version of *Peterson's Guides to Graduate Study*.

usnews.com/usnews/edu/beyond/bcrank.htm The U.S. News and World Report graduate school rankings.

apa.org The American Psychological Association.

naswdc.org The National Association of Social Workers.

salary.com Use the "salary wizard" to compare salaries by field and geographic location.

gre.org The official web site of the Graduate Record Exam.

tpcweb.com The official web site of The Psychological Corporation, publisher of the Miller Analogies Test.

AN OVERVIEW OF GRADUATE DEGREES IN HUMAN SERVICES

Degree	Average Length of Program	Program Structure and Emphasis	General Admission Criteria	Level of Competition	Licenses Required ("Licensure")	Career Opportunities
M.S.W. (master's degree in social work)	2 years.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Programs specialize in group and family counseling, social policy, psychotherapy, community organizing, administration, etc. -Many programs run during the academic year only and combine 2 or 3 days' fieldwork each week with classroom study. -The Smith School for Social Work offers summer classes with two full-time field placements during the academic year. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -GRE or MAT may be required. -A 3.0 GPA. -Strong letters of recommendation. -Documentation of clinical or social service experience showing commitment to the field. -Excellent communication skills. 	Variable; competition may be keen but is often not grade-oriented.	All social workers must be licensed, but the number and level of licenses required for specific jobs varies from state to state.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Psychotherapists in community mental health centers, general and private hospitals, court clinics, college counseling centers, and in private practice. -Case managers. -Counselors. -Group workers. -Administrators. -Supervisors. -Teachers. -Community organizers.
Ph.D. (doctor of philosophy in clinical psychology or counseling psychology)	Approximately 4 years followed by a year's post-doctoral internship.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Strong, highly structured academic program with an emphasis on research. -Comprehensive examinations, a one-year clinical internship, and a doctoral thesis based on independent research are required. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -GRE or MAT; some also require the GRE Subject Test in psychology. -A 3.5 GPA. -Research experience is highly recommended; human services experience is helpful but not always necessary. 	Very difficult, although counseling psychology programs are sometimes less competitive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Students take a licensing exam after completing the supervised post-doctoral clinical internship. -Students who complete an APA-approved program are more likely to be allowed to take the licensing exam. -Some states have additional requirements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -About half hold positions listed above under M.S.W. career opportunities. -About half teach or conduct research at a university and many are clinical psychologists in a variety of settings.

Psy.D. (doctor of psychology)	Approximately 4 years.	-Emphasis is on training clinicians. -Research is more quantitative (Ph.D. research is more qualitative). -Internships are a major focus (combined with class work). -A practically-oriented dissertation is usually required.	-GRE or MAT and the GRE Subject Test in psychology. -A clear demonstration of clinical and human services experience is required.	Difficult.	-Students may apply to take the licensing exam after the post-doctoral internship. -Students who complete an APA-approved program are more likely to be allowed to take the licensing exam.	-Most positions are clinically-oriented; graduates have careers listed above under M.S. W. career opportunities.
Ed.D. (doctor of education in clinical counseling or counseling psychology)	Approximately 4 years.	-Emphasis is on training counselors. -Comprehensive exams and a practically-oriented dissertation are required.	-GRE or MAT; some also require the GRE Subject Test in psychology.	Generally less competitive than Ph.D. or Psy.D. programs.	-Students may apply to take the licensing exam after the post-doctoral internship. -Students who complete an APA-approved program are more likely to be allowed to take the licensing exam.	-Most positions are clinically- or educationally-oriented; graduates have careers listed above under M.S. W. career opportunities.
M.A. or M.S. (master's degree in counseling)	1-2 years.	-Programs often have a particular focus (such as counseling psychology, guidance counseling, or industrial psychology) and prepare students well within a limited range of career choices. -Programs are much less competitive than others listed here.	-GRE or MAT may be required. -Prior experience in the field is useful.	Less difficult.	-Make certain your program qualifies you to become licensed.	-Positions fall within a narrower range, with each school specializing in training students for a particular profession such as guidance counseling, industrial psychology, or school psychology.