

Applying to Clinical Psychology Programs

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This document is meant to provide clarity on clinical psychology programs in Canada. It can help you make a decision regarding whether to apply. Obviously, any given application year has differences in the numbers and type of people applying. Regardless, here are some of my recommended considerations. I draw on and present data to help you understand the typical student who is accepted into clinical psychology programs and, again, make an informed decision.

I present some key questions throughout this document for you to consider. These are not questions that suggests whether you should or should not apply, but that need to be considered when deciding whether or not clinical psychology is for you.

1 Is wanting to ‘help others’ enough?

No. Many students I talk with like the idea of having the professional title ‘Clinical Psychologist’, without knowing truly what that means. Ask yourself: do you know what a clinical psychologist is/does and is that what you truly want to do. Or, do you simply like “mental health” and want to work with people. If your response is the latter, there are many career options that may best fit your aptitudes, timeline, and preferences. Consider the following flowchart, which I have adapted from the University of Michigan:

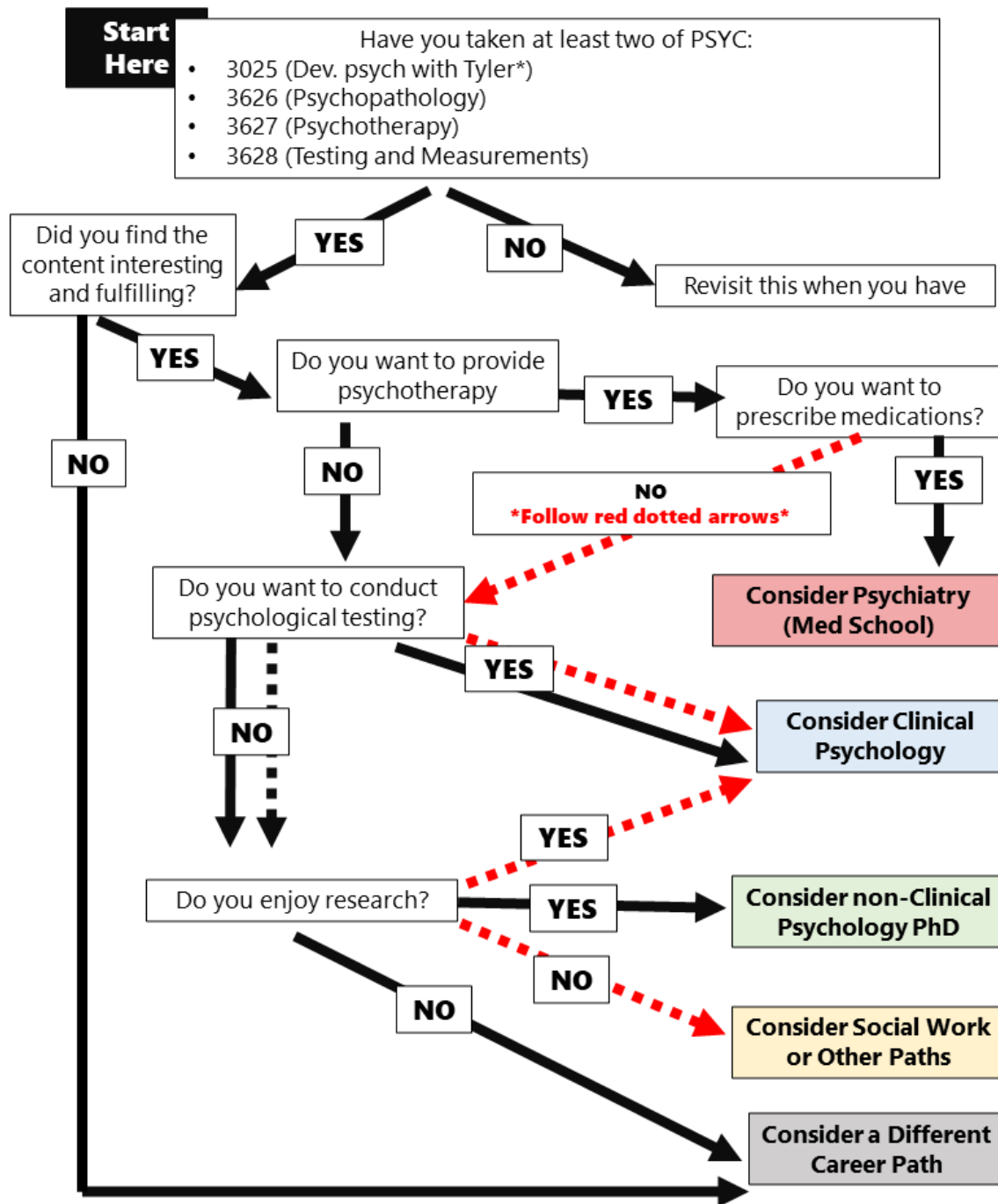


Figure 1: Flowchart

2 Do I need an honours degree?

Most clinical psychology programs require you to have an honours degree in psychology.

💡 Do you have or plan on doing an honours degree?

☐ Yes ☐ No

3 Research: Be honest with yourself

Did you enjoy PSYC 2925, 2950, and 3950? Did you hate them? Did you, at least, find some enjoyment? Most clinical psychology PhD programs follow the Scientist-Practitioner model. Student are trained to be applied psychologists who are both capable of conducting and consuming psychological research. Much time in clinical psychology programs is dedicated to learning about and conducting research. You don't just learn how to do therapy and assessment. You will complete a Master's Thesis and Doctoral Dissertation, which represents a collection of research projects/studies you design and complete. Most students also involve themselves in projects BEYOND the required thesis/dissertation. Be honest with yourself. **Could you conduct (i.e., tolerate) graduate school level research for an additional seven years? If you are not interested in conducting research, I recommend you do not apply.**

💡 Do you genuinely enjoy conducting research (i.e., research methods and statistics)?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Supervisor-supervisee Fit

A major consideration for admission into these programs is supervisor-student fit. This 'supervisor' is your research supervisor, who will interview potential applicants prior to admission to determine their research background, knowledge, potential, and fit within the program.

💡 Are you passionate about any research area?

☐ Yes ☐ No


💡 Does the area/topic align with a potential supervisor?

☐ Yes ☐ No

A note on publications

Considering that more and more applicants to clinical programs have obtained a Master's degree and that the caliber of students applying from undergraduate programs is likely increasing, many applicants have scholarly publications prior to admission.

Having a publication is not required, but likely considered an asset. Why? Having a publication can speak volumes to your ability to conduct research, which, as seen above, is integral to your application.

 Do you have a peer-reviewed publication?

☐ Yes ☐ No

4 Minimum versus Competitive GPA

While many programs have a 'minimum' average for applying, this is typically well below the actual average for the incoming students. While many institutions report a minimum GPA required of 75-78%, rarely is the minimum required GPA indicative of admitted students.

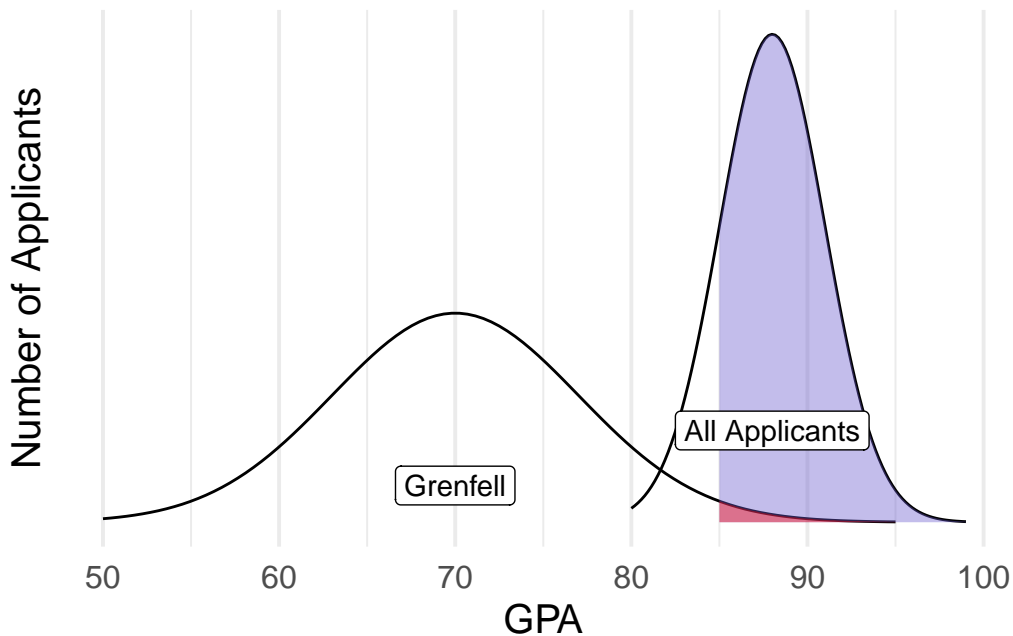
Just because you have the minimum required GPA does not mean you will be a competitive applicant.

For example, at the University of Ottawa the average of incoming students' is often between 85% – 95%. The following are the mean GPAs for admitted students in select universities. Data is for a few previous years of admissions. The mean GPA represents the overall average, not just psych courses.

- Lakehead University (88.7%)
- Simon Fraser (90%+)
- University of Ottawa (91%)
- University of Waterloo (91-92%)

The **Canadian Psychological Association** reported that the median GPA of accepted students across all Canadian programs in 2016 was 3.5 (87-90%). Given the substantial increase in applicants since 2016, see next section, this is likely an underestimate of current averages (i.e., the mean GPA for admitted students is likely higher than 87%).

The following figure simulates data that represents differences within your typical Grenfell Campus psychology cohort (assumes mean of 70) and the pool of applicants applying to the clinical programs (assumes mean of 90).



💡 Is your overall university average > 85% (i.e., within the typical range of admitted students)?

☐ Yes ☐ No

5 Seat Availability and Acceptance Rates

While the number of interested applicants has consistently increased in the previous five years, the number of available spots within the programs have remained stable. For example, at the University of Guelph the number of applicants was 81 in 2018, but 200 in 2024 (2.47x increase). At York University the numbers of applicants increased from 129 to 446 during this same period (3.46x increase). Despite this, the number of available spots **DECREASED** from 8 to 6 (yes, 6 total spots!), resulting in a decreased acceptance rate from 8-12% to 3%.

Acceptance rate for clinical psychology appears to be substantially lower than that of Canadian medical school, which often has rates around 7-10% (<https://www.umpremed.com/canadian-medical-schools>).

The Canadian Psychological Association requires programs to maintain and provide publicly-available statistics on admissions. The following are from select universities (to save space, only some universities are presented):

York University

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Seats	8	10	8	8	9	10	8
Applicants.Post_BA	175	129	175	486	457	429	446
Applicants.Post_MA	41	17	18	27	40	28	27
Offered.Admission	8	11	11	10	10	12	12
Percent.Offered	4%	8%	6%	2%	2%	3%	3%

University of Western Ontario

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-2024
Positions	10	10	10	8	6	10	5
Applications_Post_BA	130	128	177	172	296	340	255
Applications_Post_MA	20	15	21	25	39	33	24
Offered_Admission	15	11	8	11	8	9	5
Offers_Percent	10%	8%	4%	6%	2%	2%	2%
Accepted_Offer	9	7	6	7	5	7	5

University of Guelph

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-2024	2024-2025
Positions	8	8	7	7	6	6	6
Applications_Post_BA	81	115	232	211	118	181	200
Applications_Post_MA	11	5	24	19	27	14	34
Offered_Admission	11	9	7	6	8	7	7
Offers_Percent	12%	8%	3%	3%	6%	4%	3%
Accepted_Offer	8	6	7	6	5	5	6

MUN PsyD

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Positions	6	5	6	6	0	6	6
Applications_Post_BA	33	15	44	48	0	77	83
Applications_Post_MA	23	31	40	18	0	30	31
Interviewed	16	13	17	16	0	14	14
Offered_Admission	12	7	5	9	0	9	6
Offers_Percent	21%	15%	6%	14%	—	8%	5%

Dalhousie

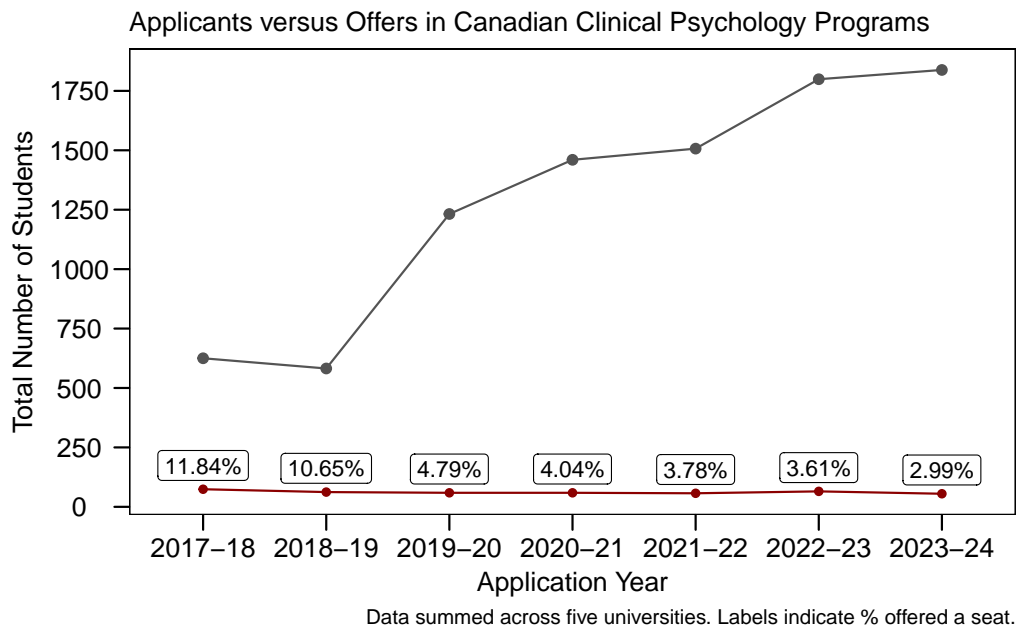
	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026
Positions	8	8	6	6	6	6	8
Applications_Post_BA	86	89	137	94	93	75	95
Applications_Post_MA	25	38	45	30	17	30	31
Interviewed	8	14	14	8	13	11	7
Offered_Admission	8	7	7	7	7	7	6
Offers_Percent	9%	8%	5%	4%	6%	6%	5%

University of Ottawa

	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Applications	156	163	165	165	210	281	306
Offers	20	17	21	16	17	21	19
Enrolled	15	16	14	15	15	15	15
Percent_Admitted	9%	10%	8%	9%	7%	5%	5%

Summary of Acceptance Rates

The following represents the total applicants versus those offered admissions across five universities.



Thus, applying to clinical psychology programs also presents a numbers game. Most applicants are likely to apply to multiple programs that fit with their interest and willingness to relocate.

💡 Are you comfortable with the idea of being rejected?

☐ Yes ☐ No

6 Time to Completion

The following represent some reported times to completion (post-Bachelor's) for graduate clinical programs.

- University of Ottawa: 6.8 – 7.6 years
- University of Manitoba: 6.5 - 7.5 years
- University of Guelph: 6.6 – 7.4 years

💡 Are you comfortable being a student and likely living outside of NL for 7 years?

☐ Yes ☐ No

7 External Funding: Should you apply?

Yes. Most programs provide suitable funding. However, external funding is strongly recommended (e.g., SSHRC). You must apply to this independently of any school application. Statistics are often presented on the proportion of accepted students who have obtained external funding, which is often high. For example, the following is from select universities (universities are not required to make these data publicly available, so I present some that I could find):

- University of Waterloo: at least 50% of admitted students since 2021 have been awarded external funding.
- University of New Brunswick: between 16% - 80% of admitted students since 2022 have been awarded external funding.

In sum, to be considered a strong applicant, you likely should apply to external funding such as SSHRC. See: <https://sshrccrsh.canada.ca/en.aspx>.

💡 Have you/will you apply to external funding?

☐ Yes ☐ No

8 Do you have time to apply?

Applying to clinical psychology programs and external funding is the workload equivalent of another university course. Furthermore, most deadlines all fall within a 2-4 week period. It's almost like having two midterms a week for four weeks straight.

💡 Do you have the time, and are you committed to excelling in another 'course'?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Furthermore, it requires much background work, research, and preparation to find suitable programs, schools, and supervisor. Deciding to apply in October for programs with application deadlines in December is ill-advised. Do you think this is what the top 5-10% of applicants is doing?

This is a live document and I will edit as new ideas/data become available.

9 Statement of Interests

Most programs require some form of a statement of interest. This statement outlines what you've done, why you've chosen their school/supervisor, and what you bring to the table. Many of the sections above are relevant to whether or not your statement will help or hurt your application (e.g., Have you demonstrated a passion for psychology throughout your degree? Have you showcased supervisor-supervisee fit?)

10 Referees

Programs will vary on the number of types of referees required. It's likely beneficial to have academic referees who have taught you multiple times and, when possible, for clinically-relevant courses.

Most applicants' referees are suggesting that they get accepted into the program; thus, strong letters of reference are not unique and are considered in concert with all other available application data.