**What are the differences between a Licensed Psychologist and a Licensed Social Worker?**

Students in psychology are often interested in becoming therapists, that is, developing the skills and knowledge to provide direct mental health services to individuals in various populations. There are several ways psychology majors might achieve this goal. Most of these paths require licensure or certification by the Board of Examiners in the state you wish to practice in. Moreover, the path you take will influence your income potential and the kinds of opportunities you will have access to.

**Paths to becoming a Licensed Psychologist**

Psychologists may be licensed in various fields (School Psychology, Counseling Psychology, Clinical, Forensic, etc…). Clinical and Counseling Psychologist usually provide direct psychological services to a variety of populations. School Psychologists work primarily in educational settings and their job mostly involves psychological assessment of children. Forensic Psychologists work in legal fields, conducting evaluations for legal purposes, and working with offender populations.

Licensure is not always required in order to provide some direct services to clients such as therapy or case management. This is because in the State of New Jersey as well as in other states, some non-profit organizations serving impoverished populations are able to obtain “exempt setting” status. This allows these agencies to hire unlicensed service providers who are then required to be supervised in all their activities by a licensed professional. Pay in these types of positions tends to be lower than that of licensed practitioners.

**Licenses available to psychologists with M.A. degrees**

With a Master’s degree, Forensic, Clinical and Counseling Psychologist can apply to become Licensed Professional Counselors. In order to do so, applicants must complete an appropriate master’s program, complete an examination, and have 4,500 hours of experience under the supervision of a Licensed Professional Counselor. The application detailing all requirements is available at this URL:

<http://www.njconsumeraffairs.gov/proc/pcappl.pdf>

School Psychologists do not have to be licensed. The State of New Jersey instead provides a Certification to work in a school setting (such as that required of teachers, but with very different requirements). In order to be eligible for School Psychology Certification, applicants must have completed a Master’s degree in school psychology and a total of 1,500 supervised hours of practice.

Note that School Psychologists are among the highest paid practicing psychologists…and most work during public school hours and have the summer off (they work on a ten-month contract, just as most teachers do).

The application detailing all requirements is available at this URL:

<http://www.state.nj.us/education/educators/license/endorsements/3100S.pdf>

**Licenses available to psychologists with a Doctoral degree (Ph.D. or Psy.D.)**

With a Doctoral degree, Forensic, Clinical and Counseling Psychologist can apply to become Licensed Psychologists. The requirements of this license are quite extensive compared to the requirements for M.A. level practitioners. However, the pay and variety of work opportunities tend to be better than they are for M.A. level practitioners. Applicants must first complete a doctoral program in clinical or counseling psychology. There are other subfields available such as Marriage and Family Counseling, but these are less common. On average, completion of a doctoral program in preparation for licensure takes approximately 5 year, but can take longer in many cases. Such programs require 3 years of intensive coursework concurrently with supervised practice, completion of a dissertation, and one year of full-time work in an internship setting with very little pay (stipends range from $0 to $20,000 for this activity). Upon completion of these requirements, applicants must then complete an additional 1,750 hours of additional practice under the supervision of a licensed psychologist.

The application detailing all requirements is available at this URL:

<http://www.njconsumeraffairs.gov/faq/psyfaqs.htm#3a>

**Paths to becoming a licensed practitioner in another field**

If your goal is to become a therapist or to work in the mental health field in some direct service capacity, then there are other paths you might consider. The most common option is a degree in Social Work. In the State of New Jersey there are 3 levels of certification and licensure for the practice of social work.

Students with a B.A. in Social Work can apply for certification as “Certified Social Workers” (CSW). These practitioners can practice social work under supervision and with some limits to the types of services they may provide.

Students with an M.A. in Social Work can first apply for licensure as “Licensed Social Workers” (LSW). This allows them to practice Social Work. Others can apply to become “Licensed Clinical Social Workers” (LCSW). Practitioners with this license have the most freedom to independently practice therapy activities.

Note that some social workers go on to earn doctoral degrees. They use the same licenses as Master’s level practitioners in their field. However, doctoral level social workers have opportunities to work in academia to educate and train other social workers in colleges and university settings.

The application detailing all requirements for each is available at this URL:

 <http://www.state.nj.us/oag/ca/social/swlic.htm>

**Some important distinctions**

*The Difference between Psychology and Social Work*

In practice, you may at first notice little difference in the kinds of activities a social worker and a licensed psychologist might engage in. However, there are significant differences. Most notably, it is important to understand that psychology is a science. As such, psychologists rely on scientific methods for developing their understanding of human behavior and for developing treatment methods.

While the strategies used by social workers rely on the scientific method, their training is more often focused on social factors and their impact on human behavior and wellness. As a result, social workers are more often involved in identifying, developing and providing community-based services to their clients.

*The Difference between “Clinical” and “Counseling”*

The term “clinical” whether in psychology or in social work, means that the focus of the work and training is on assessment, diagnosis and treatment of “pathology,” commonly referred to as mental illness.

The term “counseling” in psychology points to a focus on the strengths of individuals rather than pathology in individuals. In other words, training in counseling is focused on helping individuals improve through identification of strengths and supports.

Regardless of the focus, both Clinical and counseling psychologists have to have an understanding of mental illness and effective, evidence-based treatment strategies in order to be successful in their work.