



TEXAS BEHAVIORAL HEALTH EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

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Information Regarding Differences in Training and Education of Licensed Psychological Associates (LPA) vs. Licensed Psychologists (LP)

This information is meant to provide the reader with a general overview of the aspects of training that are, for the most part, common to master's, specialist, and doctoral level training. This information will also highlight the distinctions between the three types of training, which are typically based on quantity, discipline, or population trained.

Commonalities in Training

Those who obtain master's, specialist, and doctoral training develop a biopsychosocial understanding of processes involved in human learning, development, behavior, and adaptive and maladaptive psychological functioning in at least one population of emphasis. For example, all three forms of training involve learning about biological bases of behavior. They obtain knowledge, skills, and competence in the practice of personality assessment and intellectual assessment (may be child, adult, or both). Training also involves acquiring knowledge regarding research and statistical methods as applied in the development of the psychological knowledge base and focuses on learning about ethics and the law relevant to the practice of psychology. Lastly, all three levels of training involve multiple semesters of practicum experiences supervised by licensed psychologists.

Differences in Training

Master's Training

In addition to the knowledge and competencies common to all three types of training, master's training typically includes aspects not included in specialist training (which is specific to the practice of school psychology). The following description is based on what a master's program should contain in order to produce competent, independently practicing LPAs. This education and training typically requires students to complete at least 60 semester-hours (2-3 years full-time) of coursework and practicum/internship experiences. As part of their curriculum, trainees develop academic and applied knowledge regarding psychological assessment, an understanding of theories underlying the major (current and historical) approaches to psychotherapy, and applied training in individual and group approaches to psychotherapy. Students should receive in depth exposure to a variety of behavioral and cognitive/behavioral approaches to clinical intervention that have substantial empirical support. Master's training also involves the development of knowledge and skills regarding culturally informed, culturally sensitive practices regarding provision of psychological services. Trainees also obtain academic and applied knowledge of ethics and the law relevant to the practice of psychology. In a master's program, trainees learn about research methodologies, of theories of probability and the applications of inferential statistics at a level necessary to evaluate the quality and credibility of empirical psychological research. Master's training also includes applied skill development in assessment and psychotherapy with children and/or adults, including at least two semesters of supervised clinical practice under the direct supervision of program faculty (psychologists) followed by a 500-clock-hour external practicum, during which they practice and receive supervision at a site in the community. After graduating from a master's program, those seeking to become licensed for independent practice must also obtain additional post-graduation supervised practice experiences from licensed supervisors.

This document, when provided to patients or clients as part of the informed consent process, meets the requirements of 22 TAC 463.8(f).

Doctoral Training

Doctoral training in psychology typically consists of 110-125 hours of course work and practicum experiences over the course of 5-7 years of full-time training. This training typically includes all of the elements involved in master's training with some additions. A primary distinction is that doctoral trainees often receive additional training in the knowledge and skills necessary to conduct empirical research. That typically includes additional training in more advanced methods of statistical inference, philosophy of science, psychometrics (e.g., scale development and validation), and the production of original empirical research (typically anchored by theses and dissertations).

Doctoral training also typically includes several additional semesters for courses (e.g., advanced social and cognitive psychology) and practica, and a full year of full-time (2000 hours) practice "internship" in the community as a culminating clinical experience. The internship year and additional coursework requirements in doctoral programs provide opportunities for trainees to work with a broader range of clients, to develop greater breadth of knowledge and skills, or to begin to specialize in particular areas of practice. Doctoral training may or may not include significant experience administering, scoring, and interpreting neuropsychological assessments, although typically, licensed psychologists specializing in neuropsychology have completed additional post-doctoral training that most LPs have not. After graduating from a doctoral program, those seeking to become licensed obtain additional post-graduation supervised practice experiences from licensed psychologists.

Specialist Training

The specialist distinction is particular to the practice of school psychology. Thus, an individual who completes graduate training in school psychology (typically 2-3 years of full-time training) who seeks to practice in schools will seek out licensure as a licensed specialist in school psychology (LSSP) in Texas. Specialist training includes all elements under "Commonalities in Training" with a few additions and distinctions. Primarily, specialist training focuses on preparing specialists to provide school psychology services in schools (primary through secondary). Specialists apply their training in learning, behavior, and mental health to help children and youth succeed academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally. LSSPs collaborate with families, teachers, school administrators, and other professionals to foster beneficial learning environments. Specialist training and practice includes an emphasis in testing (e.g., cognitive, academic achievement, socio-emotional and behavioral) with respect to identifying learning or other psychosocial difficulties to facilitate placement into appropriate compensatory school-based interventions. Thus, school psychology training includes population-specific focus on personality and intellectual assessment, behavioral intervention regarding mental health issues of childhood, school psychology practice and consultation in school settings, and student diversity in learning. Specialist training does not emphasize the provision of ongoing psychotherapy in the way that a master's program training individuals for eventual LPA licensure would. Specialist training typically includes half-time practica in the 2nd year and full-time internships in schools in the 3rd year of training as culminating practice experiences.