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# Training mode and advantages of American masters in clinical psychology

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## ABSTRACT

This paper makes a systematic introduction to the objective, mode and advantages of the training of American masters in clinical psychology. The advantages are mainly reflected in diversified teaching evaluation methods, emphasizing comprehensive ability cultivation, focusing on the combination with the society, and open and active teaching system. Through the introduction, we hope to provide some references for the training of Chinese masters in clinical psychology.

**Keywords:** America, masters of clinical psychology, training mode

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Based on field studies of master's degree in psychology from the University of Massachusetts, the University of Minnesota and the University of California, San Diego, the master's program in clinical psychology in the United States mainly serves three types of people. The first kind of people is those who hope to get the Ph.D. in clinical psychology. The second is those who want to become a certified psychologist and then evaluate patients effectively. And the third is those who hope to become a corresponding social service worker. In addition to passing on knowledge about diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mental illness, the curriculum also focuses on developing appropriate capacities. However, due to "clinical psychology" is a broad term, which including many subdivisions of psychology (Gong, 1993), such as marriage and family therapy, child psychology and neuropsychology, etc. Therefore, it can be said that getting a master's degree in clinical psychology is the preparation stage of practicing psychology knowledge in different fields and facing different patients. In addition, for mental health professionals who want to pursue a potential career in clinical or healthcare management, some master's programs can be a terminal degree, such as Marriage and Family Therapy. However, this kind of situation is almost non-existent in China, and the cultivation of a master's degree in clinical psychology is not perfect, its service target is a little narrow, the cultivation purpose is not clear enough. Therefore, it is necessary to systematically introduce the training methods of American masters in clinical psychology and draw on their advantages.

### 1. Training objective

Firstly, the American master programs in clinical

psychology aim to cultivate graduates who can innovate and spread clinical knowledge and skills in clinical science, while helping them understand the interface between science and practice. Specifically, it includes the following aspects: they have the ability to carry out scientific and reasonable research projects in specific areas that they track, the ability to present and present research findings in academic conferences, the ability to publish research findings in peer-reviewed journals, the ability to design, understand and perform data analysis in clinical studies, the ability to evaluate research tools in the field of clinical psychology and related research in specific fields that I track, the ability to critically evaluate research, the knowledge of clinical psychology and the specific field that I track, the knowledge of individual differences and diversity, and they also know how to apply it to the study of clinical psychology.

Secondly, the American master programs in clinical psychology are dedicated to train graduates with the necessary clinical knowledge and skills and help them to work in the professional field of clinical psychology, while promoting their awareness of the importance of scientific evidence based clinical practice. Specifically, it includes the following aspects: the proficiency in psychometric assessment and selection of appropriate assessment tools for specific purposes, the proficiency in the management and interpretation of assessment tools used to assess psychopathological symptoms, personality, cognitive and intellectual functions, the proficiency in the use of diagnostic and statistical manual of mental illness, the understanding of empirical literature on psychosocial interventions, particularly cognitive and behavioral therapy, including the

circumstances under which these treatments are effective, the proficiency in basic and advanced intervention skills, such as effective conceptualization and expression, and development of a treatment program, and the understanding of the legal aspects involved in clinical practice, such as mandatory reporting of abuse.

## 2. Training mode

Combined with the training target above, training mode of clinical psychology is the most close to "scientists and practitioners" mode or Boulder mode which is scientist-practitioner mode. The mode has two core objectives which are engaging in scientific research and getting clinical skills (Yang, 2010). The mentor model is generally adopted for the training of clinical skills, that is, the graduate students in this major must have the same research interest as a mentor, and the mentor will directly supervise the research of the students.

During the first year of study, students need to complete basic courses and specific assessment and intervention courses. As the most basic course, Introduction to Psychology contains 15 to 20 chapters which including the content such as Stress and Health Psychology, Psychological Disorder, Psychology Therapy, etc. In medical schools, about one-fifth of the courses are psychology. If you are a psychosomatic, behavioral or psychiatric major, about half of the courses are related to psychology, including courses such as Abnormal Psychology, Counseling Psychology and Health Psychology. In addition, students will also learn basic courses such as Psychopathology, Statistics, Research Design, and participate in some studies to lay the foundation for more advanced research methods courses.

The internship starts in the next year and is arranged in the affiliated hospital of the school. In a protected clinical environment, all the clinical behaviors or practices of students will be conducted under the careful supervision of their tutors and hospital staff. During the internship period, students need to follow up specific evaluation and treatment cases and report cases within a specific time. At the same time, scientific training is continuous, cumulative and graded in terms of its complexity. At the beginning, students attend a seminar on research ethics and complete a CITI certification course, namely training on the ethical issues faced by medical research and humanities and social sciences institutions identified by the IRB-institutional Review Board (Tian, 2006). All researchers in related fields are required to have this qualification.

In the mentorship mode, students join their tutors' research projects when they enter school. At the beginning and end of each term, the tutors discuss with the students to establish appropriate and achievable research goals and to evaluate the progress of those goals. After completing the tutor's project, students can consider developing their own projects. Before the end of the first school year, students decide the topic of paper, including research proposal preparation, abstract, research ethics, IRB application, and other author questions. From the second year, students begin to work more on independent research. In general, students need to continue working with their tutors on research papers. The paper may be an independent research project or part of a larger project. However, the paper should be consistent with the student's main clinical interests. At the end of the second school year, students are required to complete the thesis defense.

All masters in clinical psychology will have internships at mental health centers and receive a series of advanced training, including assessment, diagnosis, intervention and treatment. The training is in accordance with professional ethics and the highest standards of professional operation. All interns will receive direct instruction from a number of experts in areas such as child development, adolescent behavior, and individual adult psychotherapy, neuropsychology, health psychology, assessment and treatment of hospitalized and outpatient patients, family and group psychotherapy. In addition, the implementation of psychological therapy also integrates a series of theories, including simple dynamics, cognition, behavior and psychodynamics.

### **3. Training advantages**

#### **3.1 Diverse teaching evaluation methods**

##### **3.1.1 Classroom teaching**

Most classes have textbooks, but teachers don't carry them in class. Students are required to teach themselves about 50 to 100 pages of content per week in each course. After self-learning, relevant discussions will be conducted in combination with the content of the textbook. In addition, students should also write Response Paper according to the content of the textbook, mainly focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of a chapter, the most interested part or the idea of the author, etc. In fact, this report can not only urge students to learn by themselves after class, but also exercise their critical thinking and help them find their own interest points.

##### **3.1.2 Assessment method**

The assessment methods include class attendance, class participant, group work, group work final paper, group work class presentation, individual paper, individual work class

presentation, mid-term exam, quiz and final exam. Each of these will have a percentage of the final grade, so it's not easy to get high grade.

##### **3.1.3 Final paper**

The content of the thesis is required to be very broad and not deviate from the scope of the course. Therefore, the final paper of every student will not be the same. However, choose the topic, design, investigate, summarize, ask questions and respond each situation needs students to finish by themselves, and the workload is very large. The teacher's role is simply to help them to find some literature. As a result, students are very busy even though they attend only a few classes a week, and spend most of their spare time in the library. But this process is of great help to cultivate students' ability of scientific research and innovation.

#### **3.2 Focus on the training of comprehensive ability**

##### **3.2.1 Training of thinking ability**

Students respect diversity and are open to new things and ideas, and this kind of inclusive, open and diverse thinking is evident everywhere in academia. In addition, the educational idea encourages students to think independently. What they come up with, whether good or bad, will be respected by others. This greatly promotes the development of students' active thinking and creativity.

##### **3.2.2 Training of self-learning**

Although the courses are very few, students have little free time but spend most time on self-learning, including textbooks, literature review, weekly assignments, group discussions, preparation of course papers, various tests, exams, etc. And the school is just a place to provide directions and resources. Therefore, students' self-learning ability has been greatly

exercised.

### 3.2.3 Training of thesis writing

According to the requirements, students need read 2-3 academic papers every week. When writing the final paper, they need read a lot of literature. Meanwhile, the final paper of each course should be written according to the standard of formal academic papers. Therefore, the students have developed solid writing skills. Of course, they also learned how to determine the research direction, study background and so on.

### 3.2.4 Training in other aspects

Students need to arrange and plan most of the time by themselves. In this way, the time management ability of students has been improved naturally. In addition, the school will also use a variety of methods to cultivate students' sense of social responsibility. For example, students are encouraged to participate in volunteer activities in various fields to make students clear about their social role positioning and their social responsibility.

### 3.3 Focus on the combination with society

American master of clinical psychology education attaches great importance to the combination of society (Wang, 1998). For example, the teacher will request the students to invite some outstanding experts have some communication or answer students' questions. This is a good exercise for the students' social ability and helpful for setting up related social relations or resources. In teaching, the teacher also makes a good connection between what these people say and the basic principles of psychology.

In addition, the school will require students to take the initiative to contact the corresponding internship positions and training professional skills, to participate in the campus practice class

every week to discuss what they have learned in the practice, and other students would also give suggestions. This not only helps students to understand the real work process, to deal with social relations and to contact with different social organizations, but also enables them to master various professional skills such as project design, implementation and evaluation.

### 3.4 Open and active teaching system

It's thought that the United States is the most creative country in the world (Li, et al, 2014) and the graduates are very creative, which may be attributed to their very open teaching system. Students are encouraged to take courses related to different majors. For example, students of psychology can take courses such as Conflict and Peace or Social Work. The diversity and openness of course choices gives students more opportunities to grow their knowledge and develop a multidimensional thinking model.

Not only that, the classroom atmosphere is also very relaxed and the students' value or rights are respected. In class, students can ask questions or share their personal feelings and thoughts at any time. Every student is encouraged to express his or her opinions. Students can eat and sit comfortably in class, as can teachers. Students can also leave the classroom temporarily in any situation where necessary, without the consent of the teacher. For example, when a student feels that some of the material or content in the course is physically or psychologically harmful to him or her. In addition, students have the right to evaluate the entire teaching process and the teacher's performance and give suggestions. They are also entitled to report to the school all unfair behaviors suffered in the classroom.

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