

Applied Clinical Experience Info and Opportunities

SJSU MS Clinical Psychology Program

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What is applied clinical experience?

In the field of clinical psychology, applied clinical experience involves providing intervention services related to mental health. Although graduate programs may differ in their specific definitions, it is generally safe to say that applied clinical experiences involve:

- working with individuals (e.g., clients, patients, children, adults, etc.) who are seeking help for a mental health-related problem,
- implementing a treatment plan, and
- working under the supervision of a licensed mental health professional (e.g., LMFT, LPCC, LCSW, BCBA, Psychologist), *and* participating in supervision with someone in your organization.
 - Note- your direct supervision might be provided by the licensed professional, or by another party working under their direction.

What counts as applied clinical experience?

This depends on the specific nature of every position (see above section), but generally the following **do** count as applied clinical experience. Note that these are just examples, and that many other kinds of experiences do exist:

- Providing crisis counseling on a suicide prevention/crisis counseling hotline
 - Note: experiences that involve only providing text-based crisis interventions may not provide as much depth to this clinical experience
- Providing behavioral treatment services grounded in applied behavior analysis (AKA, “ABA therapy”) to clients with autism and related disorders

- Providing counseling and resource linkage services to survivors of sexual assault (in person or via telephone)
- Working as a 1-1 paraprofessional to implement educational and behavioral interventions with a client (s) with autism in a school setting
- Working as in in-home or in-community “family specialist” as part of a multi-person mental health treatment team
- Working as a residential counselor in a residential mental health and/or substance use treatment program with youth or adults
- Working as an entry-level direct care staff member on an inpatient mental health unit

SJSU’s Clinical Mental Health Counseling graduate program’s definition of Applied Clinical Experience

SJSU’s MS in Clinical Mental Health Counseling program defines applied clinical experience as being trained to engage in some supervised psychological intervention. This allows a clinical supervisor to evaluate your skills and write a letter of recommendation if required by a graduate program.

Your volunteer or paid clinical experience must be with clinical populations in a mental health setting. This does not mean you are providing psychotherapy; it does mean that you are working around populations with psychological distress or psychopathology.

Please note that this definition applies only to the SJSU Clinical Mental Health Counseling Program, and not other graduate programs at SJSU or elsewhere.

Training Requirements

Many agencies require training before working with client populations. For some agencies this can be as high as 40 or more hours. It may be helpful to note that SJSU’s MS in Clinical Psychology program allows training hours to count toward the minimum number to apply to the graduate program.

Hours to Apply to Graduate School

It is important to note that some graduate programs will have a minimum amount of applied clinical hours to apply. For the SJSU Clinical Mental Health Counseling program, that minimum number is 100. This minimum number allows a supervisor to write a meaningful letter of recommendation for those who require one.

Agency Minimum Commitments

It is very important to note that some agencies require a minimum number of hours to be completed in order to provide verification of experience and/or a letter of recommendation for graduate school. This number can be as high as 250 hours. Be sure to inquire about this minimum if your goal in volunteering is to secure such a letter or verification of experience.

What does NOT count as applied clinical experience?

The following experiences are generally **not** considered applied clinical mental health experience for the purposes of clinical/counseling psychology Masters programs, though they may be very useful preparation for careers in behavioral health and social services. Again, note that definitions of this experience do vary somewhat across graduate programs:

- Working as a camp or after school program counselor (i.e., not a therapeutic camp or program)
- Academic tutoring
- Peer mentoring to college students
- Youth mentorship programs
- Working in a child development center or preschool as a general teacher or teacher's aide
- General peer health education on a college campus related to general health, nutrition, sexual health, dating and/or relationships, and substance use
- Babysitting or providing childcare (even if caring for youth with developmental and/or psychological problems)
- Working in a research lab collecting or analyzing data, running experiments
 - Note: Some specific clinical research activities *may* count as Applied Clinical Experience, if they involve you delivering part of a psychological/behavioral intervention in a clinical treatment study.
- Providing respite care to support caregivers of people with disabilities and/or illnesses
- Teaching general or special education classes in a K-12 school setting
- Providing administrative support (e.g., scheduling, office management, billing,

These are often valuable to provide to members of our community and may inform decisions about seeking training in mental health professions, but they do not count as applied clinical experience. They could be discussed in a statement of intent about informing decisions for graduate school but should not be listed as part of required clinical experiences for admission.

Volunteer Opportunities

*Note that some of the organizations listed below have many different volunteer positions, not all of which may be applied clinical experiences.

- Bill Wilson Center – <https://www.billwilsoncenter.org/action/index.html>
 - Center for Living with Dying and their Crisis Call Services)
 - KARA (grief support services)
- Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County
<https://www.catholiccharitiesscc.org/volunteer>
- Santa Clara Suicide and Crisis Services Hotline (other counties have similar programs):
<https://bhsd.santaclaracounty.gov/get-prevention-services/about-suicide-prevention-program>
- YWCA Rape Crisis Hotline and Advocacy services (volunteers of all genders are welcomed): <https://yourywca.org/get-involved/volunteer/>

Paid ABA Therapy Jobs

Providing ABA therapy to youth on the autism spectrum is one of the most widely available paid clinical experiences. Services are usually provided to clients in their homes, and a car is often required for travel between sites. Job titles for this work may include “ABA therapist”, “behavior interventionist,” “behavioral technician,” “behavior assistant,” and other titles. SJSU students generally meet minimum qualification for these jobs if they:

- are authorized to work in the United States,
- have reliable access to a car (note: some exceptions to this on list below), and
- are willing to commit to working at least 10-12 hours per week, mostly from ~3-8 PM M-F for at least 6 months.

ABA agencies often desire that applicants have some prior experience working with youth in some way. This might include rather informal roles like babysitting or spending a lot of time with children in your family. Entry level pay generally ranges from \$18-\$24 or more, depending on experience and qualifications.

Some Local ABA Agencies (listed in alphabetical order, not an exhaustive list)

- ABRITE (Santa Clara and Santa Cruz counties) <https://www.abrite.org/careers>
- A Is For Apple (San Jose) <http://aisforapple.com/>
- Discover Hope (Santa Clara County and Fremont)
<https://www.discover-hope.com/jobs/>
- Easter Seals of Northern California (all over the Bay Area)
<https://www.esnorcal.org/careers/>

- Gateway Learning Center (all over the Bay Area) <https://www.gatewaylg.com/careers/>
- ICAN Autism Center (Mountain View and Santa Clara County; *may have center-based opportunities for those without car access*). <https://icanautism.com/careers/>
- Open Spectrum Behavior Therapy (Oakland and Alameda County) openspectrumaba.com/careers
- Thrive Autism Center (San Jose; *may have center-based opportunities for those without car access*) <https://www.thriveautismcenter.com/>
- Trumpet Behavioral Health (all over the Bay Area) <https://tbh.com/careers/>

Other Paid Applied Psychology Jobs (some require a Bachelor's, others do not)

The following are common position titles that you can search on job-search websites. Such positions are available in very many mental health agencies and nonprofits throughout the Bay Area and Northern California.

- ABA therapist/ Behavior Interventionist
- Behavior Specialist
- Case Manager (sometimes)
- Child Life Specialist
- Crisis Counselor
- Family Readiness Assistant (for already military-affiliated individuals) – involves support and resource-finding for military families
- Family Partner
- Family Specialist
- Group Home Counselor
- Hotline Counselor
- Milieu Therapist
- Outreach Specialist
- Residential Counselor
- Survivor Advocate, Domestic Violence Advocate, etc.