

## Reflections on Choosing the Right PsyD Program

by Jed Siev

### Important caveats:

These points do not address whether the PsyD is the right degree for you. There are many pros and cons of choosing to pursue a PsyD vs. a PhD in clinical psychology, and these points are assuming you have decided to pursue a PsyD. In addition, these are heuristics, which means they are helpful shortcuts. There are undoubtedly exceptions to many of these.

### Considerations (in no particular order):

1. **Internship match rates:** At the end of graduate school in clinical psychology, students apply for one-year clinical internships. These are required for the degree and are not guaranteed (or usually even offered) by graduate programs. Students apply to sites, interview, and then there is a match system similar to the one used to place medical students in residencies. This is a highly competitive process and there is an imbalance in available slots vs. applicants such that there is a shortage of slots. It is generally recognized in the field that this is a huge problem in many ways, but in the meantime, you want to consider each program's internship match rate, as well as percent of those who match to APA-accredited internship sites. Programs are required to disclose this information.
2. **University-based vs. stand-alone:** As a rule, university-based PsyD programs are likely to be of higher quality than stand-alone programs. Similarly, non-profit programs are likely to be of higher quality than for-profit programs.
3. **Department/program size:** Program size matters in a number of ways, although certainly there can be high quality programs that are large and low quality ones that are small. On average, however, size often means variability in quality. For example, imagine a program with 20 students. The program will seek to admit the 20 best students they can. If they were to expand to 40 students, they aren't going to find better students; rather, they are likely to admit the 20 next-best students that would not have made the cut when they had 20 students. In addition to student quality, larger departments may have many excellent offerings (e.g., courses, practica), but the more students there are, the less likely you will have access to those specific offerings.
4. **Training opportunities:** I mentioned in #3 that individual students may be less able to take advantage of any particular opportunity in a large program. Regardless of size, you should identify specific training opportunities that are important to you and find out how much control you have over whether you can receive that training. For example, perhaps you are interested in child anxiety and a program houses a child anxiety clinic. Sounds perfect! But if the clinic takes 5 practicum students each year and your incoming cohort comprises 75 students, will you be able to guarantee you will have that

opportunity? This information may not be available on websites or in promotional material, so you may need to inquire directly. However, you will be unhappy if you choose a program because of one or more opportunities that never become available to you. The same would be true about specific research and teaching mentors, not just clinical practica.

5. **Training in empirically-supported or evidence-based treatments:** If you choose to pursue a PsyD rather than a PhD, it is likely that you do not envision a research-focused career. However, that is quite different from whether it is important to you to receive clinical training that is informed by the research literature. If it is important to you that you are trained in cutting edge, empirically-supported treatments even if you have no interest in creating the evidence base, you will want to select programs that emphasize such an approach. Unfortunately, PsyD programs are less likely than PhD programs to do so, so you need to do your homework and identify those that do.
6. **Theoretical orientation:** Theoretical orientation (e.g., cognitive, behavioral, psychodynamic, humanistic, etc.) is often conflated with the practice of evidence-based treatments, but they are not the same. The composition of faculty vis-à-vis theoretical orientation differs on average between PsyD and PhD programs, but also varies among PsyD programs. If this matters to you, you will need to look into it. In addition, similar to the aforementioned questions about your ability to access specific training opportunities, there is likely to be diversity among faculty in a large PsyD department in terms of theoretical orientation, which means you may want to find out how much control you will have over the types of supervision and training you receive.
7. **Performance on national licensing exam:** There are many problems with the national licensing exam. Leaving those aside, there are systematic differences between types of programs and among specific programs of any type in how well their alumni perform on the national licensing exam. These may reflect the quality of the students, the quality of the training, or something else. Whatever the reason, you would probably be wise to examine national licensing exam scores for programs you consider. These are published and available online.