

Northwestern Feinberg School of Medicine – Clinical Psychology PhD Curriculum (Years 1–4)

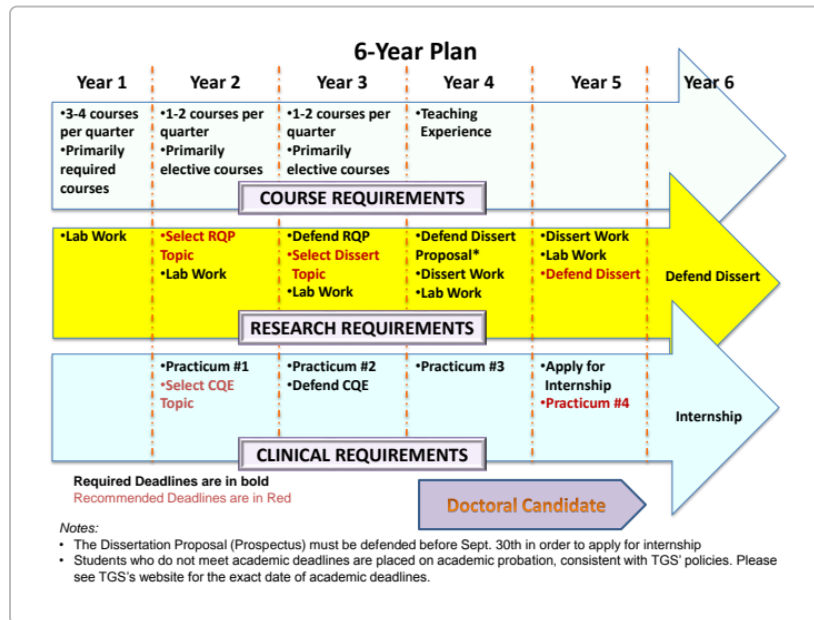


Figure: Official program timeline for Northwestern's Clinical Psychology PhD (years 1–5), showing coursework, research, and practicum milestones. By design, Year 1 emphasizes foundational science and clinical methods, Year 2 adds advanced courses and the first practicum, and Years 3–4 emphasize specialization and independent research ¹ ².

Year 1: Foundations in Science and Practice

- **Courses:** Students complete ~12 credits (3–4 courses/quarter) covering core scientific and clinical content ³. Required classes include the **Assessment sequence (Psych. Assessment I–III), Psychopathology, Introduction to Psychotherapy, Diversity in Psychological Science & Practice, Scientific & Professional Ethics**, plus advanced research/statistics (**Research Methods I–III, Advanced Design**). In addition, they take foundational discipline courses in cognition, emotion, development and neurobiology (e.g. *Cognitive Psychology, Behavioral Neuroscience, Life-Span Developmental Psychology*) ⁴.
- **Core Concepts & Theories:** The curriculum covers the major paradigms of psychology. In assessment courses, students learn standardized testing of intelligence, memory and achievement (e.g. WAIS/WISC administration) and report writing ⁵. Psychopathology courses survey DSM-5 diagnostic criteria for mood, anxiety, psychotic and other disorders and their etiological models ⁶. Students are introduced to major intervention models (CBT, psychodynamic, family systems, etc.) in *Introduction to Psychotherapy*. Simultaneously, cognitive-affective models and basic neuroscience

(e.g. brain-behavior relationships) are learned in discipline-specific classes, integrating biological, cognitive and developmental perspectives ⁴ ⁶ .

- **Key Readings/Textbooks:** Core texts typically include the *DSM-5* (APA, 2013) for diagnosis, *Sattler's Assessment of Children* or Groth-Marnat's *Handbook of Psychological Assessment* for testing, standard abnormal psychology texts (e.g. Comer's *Abnormal Psychology*), and psychotherapy theory primers (e.g. Corey's *Theory and Practice of Psychotherapy*). Statistics and research methods are supported by texts like Rumsey's *Statistics for Psychology* or Maxwell's *Designing Experiments*. (These are illustrative examples of top-tier materials used in such courses.)
- **Clinical Practicum:** Training begins immediately. In **summer of Year 1** (July onward) students start an introductory practicum (5–10 hours/week) under licensed supervision ⁷ . Typical first-year placements are within Northwestern's system – e.g. observation/assessment practicums at Northwestern Medicine's Adult Psychiatry clinic or at Lurie Children's testing service ⁸ ⁷ . The goal is orientation: students begin taking brief histories and observing intake evaluations under supervision.
- **Ethics & Multicultural Integration:** Ethical principles and cultural competence are introduced explicitly via the required **Ethics** and **Diversity** courses ⁹ ¹⁰ . From the start, students discuss confidentiality, informed consent, and culture (race, gender, etc.) in both research and clinical settings, setting a framework that guides all clinical interactions and research design.
- **Competency Goals:** By year's end, students have built a broad knowledge base – they can conduct basic psychological tests, formulate DSM-based diagnoses, and understand major treatment models. They also have the statistical and research-design skills to begin contributing in a lab ¹ ³ . This foundation supports all future learning.

Year 2: Advanced Coursework and First Practicum

- **Courses:** In Year 2 students register ~9–12 credits, shifting focus to applied and elective courses ¹¹ . A required class is **Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CLIN_PSY 444)**, which teaches CBT theory, case formulation, and interventions (e.g. cognitive restructuring, exposure) across disorders ¹² . Remaining credits come from discipline-specific and elective offerings. For example, students might take advanced **psychological assessment** (CLIN_PSY 404, focusing on clinical interviews and personality measures) ¹³ or start an elective in their track (e.g. *Behavioral Neuroscience* if not yet taken, or *Advanced Research Methodology*). Additional electives (ACT, DBT, family therapy, etc.) can be taken if workload permits.
- **Core Concepts:** Year 2 deepens clinical knowledge. The CBT course immerses students in cognitive theory (Beck's model, cognitive distortions) and behavioral principles (learning theory, activation strategies) ¹² . Assessment training continues with integration of data (projective tests, structured interviews) and cultural considerations ¹³ . Students also begin developing research skills (e.g. advanced statistics or data analysis techniques) to support their Research Qualifying Paper.
- **Key Readings/Textbooks:** Examples include Beck's *Cognitive Therapy of Depression* or *Treatment Plans and Interventions for Depression* in CBT courses, and Sattler/Groth-Marnat for advanced assessment. The SCID interview guide (First et al.) is often used for diagnostic practice. Research methods readings (e.g. textbooks on multiple regression, experimental design) accompany lab work.
- **Clinical Practicum:** Year 2 marks the **first full-year practicum (15–20+ hours/week)** ¹⁴ . Placements are assigned by Major Area of Study: e.g. Adult-track students may be at Northwestern's outpatient psychiatric clinic; Child-track students at Lurie Children's neuropsych testing service; Neuropsychology-track students at the NMG Neuropsychology clinic ⁸ ¹⁴ . Under weekly individual supervision (plus group seminars), students conduct intakes, testing batteries, and short-

term therapy as appropriate. This hands-on training builds practical skills in assessment and basic therapy under close mentorship.

- **Ethics & Multicultural:** The issues raised in Year 1 courses are now applied in practice. In practicum, students face real ethical choices (e.g. confidentiality, dual relationships) and must consider clients' cultural backgrounds in case conceptualization. Supervisors emphasize cultural humility and ethical decision-making in case discussions.
- **Competency Goals:** By end of Year 2, students have begun to integrate science and practice. They can administer and interpret several psychological tests, do diagnostic interviewing, and conduct CBT-informed therapy under supervision. They also have engaged in original research design – by this point they *begin* their Research Qualifying Paper (an empirical study with mentor support) ¹⁵. This year prepares them for greater independence: managing a caseload (~1–2 therapy cases) while writing and analyzing a modest research project.

Year 3: Specialization and Advanced Skills

- **Courses:** Students register another 9–12 credits, choosing remaining required and elective courses ¹⁶. By Year 3 most core requirements are done, so coursework is largely electives aligned with students' Major Area. Typical offerings include: **Advanced Psychotherapy** models (e.g. *Dialectical Behavior Therapy* CLIN_PSY 447 ¹⁷, *Acceptance & Commitment Therapy* CLIN_PSY 446 ¹⁸), **Family Therapy** (CLIN_PSY 432), **Sexual Disorders & Couple Therapy** (CLIN_PSY 442) ¹⁹, **Child/Adolescent Psychotherapy** or **Child Psychopathology** (for Child track) ²⁰, **Neuropsychology** (Principles of Neuroimaging CLIN_PSY 471; Neuropsych Assessment 475) ²¹ ²², **Behavioral Medicine/Health Psychology** (CLIN_PSY 476–478) ²³, **Forensic Psychology** (CLIN_PSY 483) ²⁴, etc. Electives can also include advanced statistics or seminar courses (e.g. Diversity or Social Psychology seminars). Students tailor this year to their interests and intended specialty.
- **Specialization Tracks:** By Year 3 each student has declared a Major Area of Study (Adult, Child, Neuropsychology, Forensic, or Behavioral Medicine) ²⁵. Electives and practica match this track. For example, a Clinical Adult student might focus on trauma or couples: Northwestern has a Child Trauma Center that doctoral students can rotate through, and the *Sexual Disorders & Couple Therapy* course covers marital/sexual issues ¹⁹. A Health/Behavioral Medicine student would take *Health Psychology* (CLIN_PSY 476) and *Motivation & Self-Control in Health Behavior* (477) ²³. A Neuropsychology student enrolls in *Brain & Behavior: Intro to Neuropsychology* (472) and *Neuroanatomy* (473). Thus by mid-program students develop deep expertise (e.g. specialized intervention models, developmental psychopathology, medical neuro, etc.) within their chosen niche.
- **Key Readings/Textbooks:** Specialized courses use advanced texts: e.g. Linehan's *DBT Skills Training Manual* for DBT, Hayes's *ACT: An Experiential Approach* for ACT, Nichols & Schwartz's *Family Therapy* for systems work, Mash & Barkley's *Child Psychopathology* for child disorders, Lezak's *Neuropsychological Assessment* for neuro track, and primary literature (e.g. NIH "Clinical Practice Guidelines" for couples therapy). Again, exact readings depend on instructor.
- **Clinical Practicum:** This is the **second year-long practicum** (15–20+ hrs/week) ¹⁴. Placements become more specialized: examples include VA medical centers, hospital inpatient units, outpatient specialty clinics (depression/anxiety, pediatric rehab, etc.) or prison/forensic settings ²⁶. Students carry more complex cases (often their own therapy case load and test batteries) and must demonstrate integrated skills. Supervision remains weekly (individual and group), but students are expected to take increasing initiative in case formulation and treatment planning.

- **Ethics & Multicultural:** Ethical decision-making and cultural considerations become second-nature. For instance, when treating diverse populations (e.g. working with non-English-speaking clients or clients from different religious backgrounds), students apply multicultural frameworks learned earlier. All faculty mentors and supervisors emphasize culturally informed practice and research ethics in ongoing seminars and case conferences.
- **Competency Goals:** By the end of Year 3 students must pass the **Clinical Qualifying Exam** (demonstrating mastery of clinical theory, ethics, and case judgment) and complete the **Research Qualifying Paper** ²⁷. This reflects integrated competency: they have shown independent case conceptualization skills, applied interventions, and published or near-publishable empirical work. In sum, Year 3 consolidates knowledge across domains (biological, cognitive, social, developmental) and starts launching students into autonomous researcher- and clinician-level roles.

Year 4: Advanced Practicum, Research, and Teaching

- **Courses:** Few formal classes remain. Students typically enroll in **Advanced Study/Research credit (TGS 500/590)** while focusing on dissertation research ²⁸. Any remaining elective requirements (if any) are finished, but most coursework is complete by Year 3. At most, students might take a seminar or two if needed for professional development, but the emphasis is on independent work.
- **Research:** The primary focus is the dissertation. By the end of Year 4 the dissertation proposal must be defended ²⁹. Students often continue contributing to publications and seek external funding (e.g. NIH F31). Approximately 20–30 hours/week remain in the research lab as students transition to project leadership ².
- **Clinical Practicum:** This is the **third (sometimes fourth) year-long practicum**, with even greater responsibility ³⁰. Placements are “advanced” — for example, as lead therapist in a specialty program or senior diagnostician in neuropsych. Students manage more challenging cases with greater autonomy (e.g. conducting long-term therapy, comprehensive neuropsych evaluations) under supervisory oversight. A typical commitment remains ~15–20 hours/week ¹⁴. This advanced training ensures that students are ready to assume full responsibility on internship.
- **Teaching Experience:** In accordance with Northwestern policy, each student serves as a **Teaching Assistant for one quarter in Year 4** ³¹ ³². This involves lecturing and leading discussion/lab sections for courses taught to first-year students (often research methods or statistics). Through teaching, students reinforce their grasp of foundational material and gain pedagogical skills.
- **Ethics & Multicultural:** By Year 4, ethical and cultural considerations inform all activities. Students now mentor junior clinicians, ensuring they model confidentiality and cultural humility. In research, they address ethics of human subjects (IRB procedures) and issues like justice (e.g. designing studies with diverse samples). Continual reflection on multicultural competence (a focus of the diversity seminar) is expected in leadership roles.
- **Competency Goals:** Year 4 cements the transition from trainee to independent clinical scientist. Students complete their dissertation proposal and continue advanced research, demonstrating scholarly independence ²⁹. Clinically, the advanced practicum and TA role show that they can function as entry-level psychologists: diagnosing and treating patients across populations, supervising others informally, and teaching peers. This sets the stage for Year 5–6 internship, where they will apply their fully integrated competencies in practice.

Sources: Northwestern Feinberg School of Medicine Clinical Psychology PhD official curriculum pages and handbook ¹ ³³ ³ ⁹ ¹⁴ ¹⁶ ³⁴ (supplemented by relevant course descriptions and peer-program standards ²⁵ ²). Each year’s elements are drawn from Northwestern’s published timeline, course catalog, and graduate handbook, ensuring accuracy to the Feinberg program.

1 8 15 26 27 29 30 31 34 Timeline: Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences: Feinberg School of Medicine

<https://www.psychiatry.northwestern.edu/education/clinical-psychology-phd/curriculum/timeline.html>

2 Clinical & Research Training: Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences: Feinberg School of Medicine

<https://www.psychiatry.northwestern.edu/education/clinical-psychology-phd/curriculum/clinical-research-training.html>

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25 Clinical Psychology: The Graduate School - Northwestern University

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32 Microsoft Word - NUFSM Clin Psy Teaching Requirement.2010

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33 Courses: Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences: Feinberg School of Medicine

<https://www.psychiatry.northwestern.edu/education/clinical-psychology-phd/curriculum/courses.html>