

Frequently asked questions about Postgraduate Counselling Psychology study

What are the entry criteria into the various postgraduate programmes in Counselling Psychology?

To be admitted to the Bachelor of Health Science (Honours) degree, an applicant must have completed a Bachelor of Health Science degree with a major in psychology (or equivalent, e.g. Bachelor of Arts or Graduate Diploma in Health Science) with a B+ grade average or higher in psychology papers at Level 7 (third year).

After completing the Bachelor of Health Science (Honours) degree, students can apply for the Master of Health Science in Psychology/ Postgraduate Diploma in Counselling Psychology programme which is currently offered as an integrated 2-year package.

Entry is competitive and based not only on academic merit, but also on a written submission as well as an interview with a panel. A police check and references are also required. This selection process takes place in the year preceding the year of academic study – written submissions are usually due in towards the end of October and interviews take place at the end of November or early December. Applicants must be present in person for the interview.

Enrolment in the Postgraduate Diploma in Counselling Psychology is subject to registration with the NZ Psychologists' Board as an intern psychologist, and the securing of a suitable internship position (AUT has several internship providers, but agencies tend to interview for these positions). Note that a further selection interview may be required. The Honours and Masters degrees develop the academic foundations, specifically in Counselling Psychology, necessary for students to engage in their internship.

How is the Counselling Psychology programme structured?

The Counselling Psychology programme at AUT consists of three programmes: the BHSc (Hons) in Psychology, the MHSc in Psychology, and the PGDip in Counselling Psychology. The content of these programmes is prescribed as they form a part of an accredited programme of study and prepare students for registration as Counselling Psychologists with the NZ Psychologists' Board.

What is Counselling Psychology?

Counselling Psychology is defined by the New Zealand Institute of Counselling Psychology as:

"A psychological specialty that utilises and applies psychological knowledge and research at the individual, group, and organisational level. Counselling psychologists enable and empower clients experiencing typical and atypical problems of living to enhance their personal, social, educational and vocational functioning."

The New Zealand Institute of Counselling Psychology specifies that the scope embraces a range of assessment and treatment approaches as well as preventative and educational programmes, and acknowledges the importance of phenomenological perspectives as well as the influence of developmental and ecological factors. (from: <http://www.psychology.org.nz>)

More generally, counselling psychologists tend to work with a relatively healthy population who are experiencing developmental and adjustment problems, while clinical psychologists need to be equipped to work with people with severe psychiatric disorders. Counselling psychologists are frequently involved in promoting clients' resilience and strengths, and mental health promotion and prevention work. Counselling psychologists may also offer vocational counselling.

Where are counselling psychology placements and internships offered?

The postgraduate counselling psychology programme has relationships with a range of agencies offering placement opportunities and internships. Places are limited and may vary from year to year. Most placements and internships are not paid positions, and most agencies offering internships select students by interview. Placement and internship agencies, or places of employment for our graduates have included: SAFE, Ministry of Education, District Health Board Mental Health teams, PGF, Mindfulness Works, Student Counselling, Child Youth and Family, Family Action, Youth line, Youth Horizons Trust, CADS, Eating Disorders, amongst others.

Can I study part-time or via distance?

The Bachelor of Health Science (Honours) and Master of Health Science in Psychology degrees can be taken on a part-time basis but are not offered as distance education options.

The internship for the Postgraduate Diploma in Counselling Psychology is a full year of practice (4 days a week working in a practice setting – the equivalent of 1500 hours as required by the Psychologists' Board) and one day a week at the North Shore campus. The internship is an integral part of the Postgraduate Diploma in Counselling Psychology.

What if I have an undergraduate qualification in a related field, but not psychology, and wish to pursue postgraduate psychology study?

You may choose to enroll in a Graduate Diploma in Health Science, in which you will need to complete some Level-6 (Year 2) and Level-7 (Year 3) Psychology papers. You will need to maintain a B+ average to be selected for the Bachelor of Health Science (Honours) programme in psychology.

Please contact the undergraduate programme leader, Dr Rhoda Sherman (Rhoda.sherman@aut.ac.nz) for more information on the Graduate Diploma.

What if I have postgraduate qualifications in psychology from another university or country?

Students from other universities/programmes

Since our programmes are geared specifically towards Counselling Psychology, with prescribed content, students from other universities with different backgrounds (e.g. in Health or Clinical Psychology) may often find that they need to complete the Bachelor of Health Science (Honours) programme at AUT prior to being able to apply for the Master of Health Science in Psychology and Postgraduate Diploma in Counselling Psychology. For the Postgraduate team to assess your eligibility to apply for our programmes, please send a full academic transcript of papers you have taken, the grades obtained, as well as an outline of the course content for each of these papers.

Students with international qualifications

If you are registered and working as a psychologist in another country, a first step is to liaise with the NZ Psychologists' Board who can advise if you would be able to obtain registration in New Zealand. Note that since our programme is specifically geared towards Counselling Psychology, students with different backgrounds (e.g. in Health or Clinical Psychology) may often find that they need to complete the Bachelor of Health Science (Honours) programme at AUT prior to being able to apply for the Master of Health Science in Psychology and Postgraduate Diploma in Counselling Psychology. Further, because cultural competency and knowledge are key requirements, students with international qualifications may also find that they need to complete the Bachelor of Health Science (Honours) programme at AUT prior to being able to apply for the Master of Health Science in Psychology and Postgraduate Diploma in Counselling Psychology.

For further information on postgraduate psychology please contact:
Associate Professor Kirsten Van Kessel, Postgraduate Counselling Psychology Programme Leader: kirsten.vankessel@aut.ac.nz