

The Institute for the Psychological Sciences: An Integrative Catholic Approach to Clinical Training

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Institute for the Psychological Sciences

The Institute for the Psychological Sciences (IPS) is a free standing school of professional psychology dedicated to the clinical formation of students in a manner consistent with the Catholic understanding of the person, marriage and family, as well as being equally consistent with the science of psychology. The Psy.D. program at the IPS utilizes a modified version of the traditional "Practitioner Scholar" training model but integrates a Catholic anthropology for answering such questions as: 1) What is the nature of the person and of psychological problems? 2) What is the nature and goals of psychotherapy? 3) What is the role of the therapist and client in psychotherapy? and 4) What is the appropriate formative approach to training Catholic mental health professionals? Under such a training paradigm, significant attention is given to areas either not traditionally examined or which are only now emerging in secular psychology, including: An emphasis on human flourishing, the importance of spirituality, utilizing a Catholic personality theory, tailoring therapy to benefit the vocational state of the client, dialogue and consistency between secular professional ethics/standards and Christian ethics, and the integrating of one's professional life and life as a Christian.

The Institute for the Psychological Sciences (IPS) is a free standing professional school in clinical psychology located in Arlington, Virginia, several minutes from Washington, DC. It was established by its founder, Dr. Gladys Sweeney in 1999.

Our Basic Philosophy of Clinical Education

The following excerpt from our Mission Statement captures the essence of who we are:

The Institute for the Psychological Sciences, an institute of higher education offering Master's and Doctoral degrees, affiliated with the Legionaries of Christ, is dedicated to the renewal of the Christian intellectual tradition and the development of a psychology consistent with the teachings of the Catholic Church and in constructive dialogue with the modern world.

The Institute seeks to provide an effective academic and educational environment that supports the integration of the psychological sciences with the Catholic understanding of the person through teaching and learning

both knowledge and necessary clinical skills and assists students intellectually and professionally as they prepare themselves to respond to their calling as mental health professionals.

Integral to the Institute's mission is the development of Catholic approaches to psychology within the broader professional community, both nationally and internationally.

We are in spirit closely identified with the work and mission of many of the existing Protestant Christian programs which seek an integrative approach to training mental health professionals. Our identity as a Catholic institution is central to our mission and so we seek to be in conformity with Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (John Paul II, 1990) concerning Catholic colleges and universities.

Program Model and Objectives

The IPS offers three degree programs: the M.S. in Clinical Psychology, the Psy.D. in Clinical Psychology, and the M.S. in General Psychology. In this article we will exclusively focus on the education and training process for the Psy.D. program.

The Psy.D. training process is designed to be completed in five years. Graduation criteria include completion of 122 credit hours of coursework which can be completed in 4 years of full-time study. In addition to coursework students must complete M.S. comprehensive examinations

(and receive an M.S. degree), third and fourth year externship placements, Psy.D. comprehensive examinations, a pre-doctoral internship approved by the American Psychological Association (APA) or the Association of Psychology Post-doctoral and Internship Centers (APPIC), and a dissertation.

For training its students, the IPS Psy.D. program in Clinical has adopted a modified version of the Practitioner Scholar model which targets formation in nine areas of knowledge and competence: 1) Therapeutic and professional relationship skills, 2) Assessment, 3) Therapeutic interventions 4) Basic psychological science content areas (e.g., developmental, cognitive, social, etc.), 5) Research design and statistics, 6) Professional roles and issues, 7) Ethics and legal issues, 8) Diversity issues, and 9) Utilizing an integrated Catholic approach to mental health practice. As a foundational part of this model, our students must first and foremost master the standard body of knowledge and skill sets which allow them to meet standards for licensure in the state of Virginia and other states. In the design of our curriculum, we have been careful also to observe standards promulgated by the American Psychological Association and also by the National Register and Association of State and Provincial Psychology Boards that recognizes us as a designated program in psychology.

The Educational Process

The educational process we espouse is systematic and progressive with regard to each of the nine areas of knowledge and competencies mentioned earlier. Given the focus of this article on clinical training, we will limit examination of this systematic and progressive process to the areas of training in therapeutic skills, assessment, and providing mental health services from an integrated Catholic perspective.

The instruction and training for psychotherapy begins in the first semester of the curriculum with a course in basic clinical skills. This foundational training is followed by three courses in the areas of child, adult, and marital/family therapy in the first two years of training. Students receive additional training in adult, child, and marriage/family through three additional advanced courses in these areas (year 3), and also receive training in group psychotherapy (year 4).

Concurrent with training in psychotherapy is the assessment training sequence, beginning with a course in interviewing (1st semester), followed

by courses in psychopathology (2nd semester), psychological measurement (2nd semester), cognitive assessment (3rd semester), personality assessment (4th semester) and advanced personality assessment (6th semester).

Similarly, while obtaining training in assessment and psychotherapy, students are also concurrently receiving systematic and progressive sequence of coursework in philosophy and theology aimed at developing a Catholic understanding of the person. This coursework includes Catholic anthropology (1st semester), the moral life (2nd semester), marriage and family life (3rd semester), world views and religions (4th semester), the relationship between spiritual and psychological functioning (4th semester), and an integrative dissertation seminar (3rd year).

Students are required to participate in a 10-month 20-hour per week externship in the IPS Training Clinic during their third year in the Psy.D. program. The decision to require students to practice on-site during their early formation as clinicians has provided several benefits. First, because students are supervised by IPS faculty, they can practice the same therapeutic methods that they learned in class and receive supervision from experts from whom they learned these methods. Second, as students are beginning to work with clients they can receive mentorship and supervision in how to apply a Catholic perspective in assessment, diagnosis, and treatment planning and implementation, and thus once again, they can make the transition from course instruction to clinical application in a supportive environment where such a perspective is known and respected. Finally, because of the wide range of expertise, the IPS can provide a rich supervision environment. Students are assigned a faculty member as their primary supervisor. However, students also have opportunities to participate in group supervision in areas such as child therapy, marriage/family therapy, and group therapy when their caseload contains such clients. In addition, faculty members are readily available and accessible to students for additional in-person meetings throughout the week should a crisis or serious concerns arise.

In their fourth year of training, students typically compete for traditional externship settings throughout the District of Columbia, Northern Virginia, and suburban Maryland counties. In their fifth year students are expected to complete full-time pre-doctoral internships which are either APA accredited or meet the standards for APPIC.

The IPS maintains close monitoring of the clinical training process of its students both in the context of classroom performance, as well as success in externships or internships. In the context of each course, feedback on clinical skill development is given informally on a weekly basis by the instructor and/or the teaching assistant for a course. However, each instructor of a clinically oriented course is also required to complete a formal clinical rating scale (CRS) relating to each student's knowledge level and clinical skill performance in the area of focus for that course. CRS rating categories are directly linked to the nine Psy.D. program objectives of the Psy.D. program.

Student progress at externship and internship sites is monitored through evaluation forms completed by the site supervisor each semester. The rating categories used for this evaluation are also linked to the Psy.D. program objectives. Students also have an opportunity to evaluate their externship and internship site each semester. More informal assessment of how externship placements are going is obtained by students in weekly class meetings of the Clinical Practicum course sequence which they are required to participate in while on externship.

At the end of each semester, the faculty meets to review each student's progress in the program, and the clinical skills ratings for each course and externship or/internships evaluation forms allow the faculty to have both broad and specific knowledge of the student's progress. If during the review process any major skill deficiencies are noted, a remediation plan is developed by the Director of Clinical Training (and instructor if applicable) with the student. Because of the very nature of our core mission, the corrective process is generally nurturing and consistent with an appreciation of the dignity of the person under review.

In concluding this section, it should be noted that all of the members of our clinical faculty are devout Catholic or Protestant Christians who are comfortable with their beliefs and expert in the integration of faith with the discipline of clinical psychology. Our current policy is to only use this core group of clinical faculty members for clinical course instruction and supervision rather than to rely on the use of adjunct faculty who would generally have much less knowledge of our mission and experience with integration. We believe that this decision has ensured a consistent quality and experience for our students that

provides them with a firm foundation in the practice of the mental health sciences from a Christian perspective.

The Integrative Dimension in Clinical Training at the IPS

At the IPS, the integration of the psychological sciences with a Catholic Christian view of the person shapes the answers to fundamental questions such as: 1) What is the nature of the person and of psychological problems? 2) what is the goal of psychotherapy? 3) what is the role of the therapist in the therapist-client relationship? and 4) what is the formative process used to train therapists? (Brugger, 2009; Moncher, 2009; Nordling & Scrofani, 2009; Scrofani & Ross, 2009; Sweeney, Titus, & Nordling, 2009; Titus & Moncher, 2009; Vitz, 2009; Vitz & Brugger, 2009). For the purposes of examining how such an integration occurs in the clinical training of our students, we will first share the faculty's working definition of a "Catholic Approach to Psychotherapy". This definition, which is included in its entirety below, is distributed to students early in their training and is elaborated on in depth in courses throughout the Psy.D. curriculum.

A Catholic approach to psychotherapy integrates scientific psychology's theoretical and empirically based knowledge of the person with the philosophical and theologically based knowledge of the person from the Catholic faith. It is one in which a mental health professional, viewing his or her profession as a vocation, and guided by Catholic ethical principles, utilizes a Catholic understanding of the person, marriage and family life, and of human flourishing—grounded in Sacred Scripture and the Magisterium—in order to assess problems, and to plan and implement empirically supported therapeutic interventions, with due regard for the uniqueness of the client.

This uniqueness of the client is manifested in the client's personal worldview, which is developed over time in the context of the client's culture, religion, family and individual experiences. The mental health professional utilizing this approach is also

sensitive to the fact that, for the Christian client especially, but also for many other clients, this worldview may be shaped by the client's response to a personal call to holiness, their particular vocational state in life—single, married, clergy or religious—and their personal professional vocation.

The therapeutic relationship so conceived is an interpersonal relationship in which the therapist is in service of the client's healing, flourishing, and life goals, in a manner which reflects love of neighbor, and which is respectful of the client's innate uniqueness and dignity, and of their conscience and freedom to make life decisions.

This definition guides the manner in which integration occurs in the clinical training of our students and fundamentally and foundationally shapes such training from the broad program and curriculum levels to the specific course/instructor level or even individual student formation level.

At the program level, we have with great determination forged a multidisciplinary approach to training clinicians to practice psychology in an integrated manner. Our faculty includes clinical psychologists, a social psychologist, a cognitive psychologist, sociologist, philosophers and theologians. This faculty is all housed with the department and interacts with each other on a daily basis and participates in professional development together. All faculty members have a basic working knowledge of Catholic teaching and of basic science in psychology and clinical psychology, regardless of their specialty. All courses—even those in theology and philosophy—are taught in a manner that emphasizes the relevance of course content for forming clinical psychologists to work with clients from an integrated Catholic approach. In short, common to our goal of clinical training is that all faculty regardless of discipline and expertise have a core understanding of the areas of knowledge to be integrated and common commitment to do so.

This working definition also has significant implications that guide the development of the design of our curriculum for training clinicians. Whereas some programs see training in child, family, and marital psychotherapy as elective specializations of the mental health field, the IPS

views comprehensive training in such methodologies as essential given its vocational view of the person. For example, when a married individual who has children comes for treatment—even for what the client identifies as “individual” problems—the therapist would necessarily also assess the quality of the client's marital relationship, parent-child relationships, and success in the role of co-parenting and address any problems in these areas in the treatment plan. In addition, the treatment plan would make clear how the client's initial “individual” concerns are both impacted by and impacting on their spousal and parent-child relationships. Therefore our students take a total of twelve credit hours of courses in the areas of child, marriage, and family therapy such that when appropriate they can develop and either implement or ensure the implementation of a comprehensive treatment plan.

Our working definition emphasizes that a central tenet of clinical practice from an integrated perspective is the respect of the uniqueness and dignity of the client and the client's right to exercise human freedom in accord with conscience in establishing therapeutic goals and making life goals. Developing knowledge of ethical issues and of cultural, religious, and individual diversity, as well as the skill in applying such knowledge, are central to practicing in a manner that honors the dignity of the person. Accordingly, we teach two specific courses covering the area of ethics—one is a foundational philosophical course in Catholic ethical principles and the nature of moral reasoning and the other in the knowledge and application of standard ethical principles in the practice of psychology. In addition, we teach two courses centering exclusively on the respect for diversity—one is a foundational course on worldviews and religions and the other in knowledge of and application of information on cultural, religious, and individual differences in clinical practice. However, given the central importance of ethical issues and diversity issues for safeguarding the dignity of the client, such areas are actively addressed in a more situation specific manner in each of the dozen or so basic and advanced courses in assessment and psychotherapy, as well as in the supervision received in their year long practicum in the IPS Training Clinic.

The year long placement in the IPS Training Clinic makes a vital contribution to our student's understanding of and ability to utilize an Integrated Catholic approach to clinical practice. Although the students can gain in their coursework an

understanding of all the component knowledge and skills necessary to assess the client and his problems, to develop a treatment plan, and to deliver treatment interventions utilizing an integrative perspective, applying this knowledge and skills in clinical practice is a very complex task. In addition, as our working definition indicates, students must be given the opportunity to master empirically supported therapeutic methods and prudently determine how to integrate these into treatment. Placement in the IPS Training Clinic allows a supportive environment for accomplishing both formative goals. Students receive individual and group-level supervision in assessment and psychotherapy from IPS faculty. First, this allows them to have as mentors for their first clinical experiences supervisors who both know and respect an integrative approach to clinical practice and who have intimate knowledge of the training the students have received to date so that such knowledge can be utilized in their formation. Second, students are able to practice, receive supervision, and attain basic level mastery of the very empirically supported methods that they have learned in course instruction, as well as developing clinical judgment concerning when the utilization of such methods is appropriate. Although it makes sense logically to allow students to have an opportunity in their first experiences in clinical practice to make use of knowledge and skills that they have spent so much time acquiring in course instruction, this does not appear to be the norm in many programs where first experiences occur in external settings where supervisors have little or no knowledge of integration or the therapeutic methodologies known by the student. While diversity in training experiences is essential to the formation of mature clinicians, we believe that it is vital that our students first obtain a solid grounding in an integrative Catholic perspective and that they acquire competency in some basic empirically supported therapeutic methodologies consistent with a Catholic understanding of the person.

Finally, as our working definition implies, a great deal of the criteria for success in the clinical training of students to practice an integrated Catholic approach to psychology and psychotherapy rests with the voluntary individual spiritual formation of such students who truly feel personally called to serve God and neighbor as a mental health professional. Every professional vocation requires certain knowledge, skills, virtues and types of sacrifice. These virtues and ability to lovingly sacrifice come

from solid spiritual formation. Although the IPS is small in size, the availability of opportunities for this personal spiritual formation are so important that it maintains its own chapel and chaplain which allows students, faculty, and staff alike the opportunity for attendance at daily mass, opportunities for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, spiritual direction and spiritual retreats. The IPS also contributes to this formation of its students by very careful selection of its faculty who can serve as professional models and who are also engaged in personal spiritual formation. In short, the clinical formation of our students occurs in the context of a vibrant community of faith.

Interface with the Professional and Mental Health Community

The major share of formal interfacing with the professional and mental health community comes in the form of the clinical placement of doctoral students in practica and internships, and collaboration with the associated staffs of these settings. The Director of Clinical Training (DCT) and other faculty, as well as the students themselves in certain instances, have been instrumental in establishing practicum and externship sites within the local area.

There is a long history of our students finding quality practicum/externship sites in both faith based and secular mental health facilities, clinics and group practices. Faith based practicum sites which have accepted our students include the Meier Clinics in Northern Virginia and Maryland, the Alpha Omega Clinic (with locations throughout the Washington, DC metro area). St. Luke's Center, large Christian group practices and most recently Catholic Charities of Arlington and the Georgetown University Pediatric Bioethics Program. Secular practicum sites which have accepted our students include Children's National Medical Center, the Hospital for Sick Children, Washington, D.C. Superior Court, the Psychiatric Institute of Washington, Community Support Services in Maryland and various other community mental health clinics, and state hospitals. Our students have demonstrated in all of these settings as well as in their respective internships (addressed below) that faith based practice can successfully be integrated in the delivery of mental health services in both Christian and secular settings. In short our students have convincingly demonstrated that the integrative model that they

utilize can make sense to supervisors and clients in a wide variety of Christian and secular settings in as much as they are consistent with APA ethical principles and sound practices in clinical and developmental psychology.

We should note that both our students and faculty have had a long and special relationship with the Alpha Omega Clinic—one of the few Roman Catholic outpatient treatment centers in the country which adopts an integrated Catholic practice model. Members of the IPS faculty, IPS graduates, graduates from other Christian universities (e.g., Regent University), and a multidisciplinary team of other Catholic mental health professionals have worked together at the Alpha Omega Clinic to train our students and explore how to deliver high quality mental health services from within a Catholic perspective.

Faith based pre-doctoral internship training has also been in abundance over the years. Students are, of course, accepted into these internships on a competitive basis according to the rules and procedures of APPIC and by the "National Match." Our interns have been trained at the Catholic Social Services of Nebraska (CSS), the first APA accredited integrative Catholic internship site in the nation. It was established by Dr. Katherine Benes, who later served on the IPS faculty for three years and continued the development of our IPS Clinic. One of our students was accepted by the Danielsen Institute at Boston University. Their stated mission is to alleviate suffering and to promote healing, growth, and change in the person through service, training, teaching, and research which emphasize depth psychotherapy and are informed by spiritual, religious, and existential perspectives. This year, we were pleased to find that a student was accepted into the Christian Area Christian Training Consortium, which encompasses five mental health agencies and Wheaton College Graduate School. Finally, we have discovered that some of the staff in secular externship and internship programs take a positive view of faith based training programs like ours.

There has also been a history of collaboration between IPS and other Catholic mental health centers in terms of training and research. IPS faculty have offered in-service training for the Alpha Omega Clinics and for our local Catholic Charities. Another form of collaboration with faith based training centers involves the research dimension of integration. This is just beginning for IPS. With respect to mental health centers,

some research data has already been gathered at the IPS clinic and the DCT has coordinated the collection of research data at two branches of the Alpha Omega Clinic involving his work on interpersonal concepts and relationality; key aspects to our Catholic Anthropology.

Above and beyond clinical placements, IPS has a rich array of formal and informal relationships with other institutions, professional organizations and nationally and internationally recognized scholars. We will mention just a few of our major initiatives.

Each year, we sponsor the John Henry Cardinal Newman Lecture series, open to IPS students and the public at large. These involve scholars in science, psychology, philosophy, law, theology, sociology, literature, journalism and literature from all over the world. This year our topic was "Brains, Minds, Selves and Others: Neuroscience, Neurotechnology and Social Good" and featured five speaking engagements from scholarly scientists and physicians.

IPS in collaboration with Blackfriars Hall at the University of Oxford, has established "The Center for Philosophical Psychology" for the purpose of developing and promoting a deeper theoretical understanding of the human person. The Centre aims to promote reflection, research and writing on philosophical psychology. Philosophical psychology is established neither by empirical nor by clinical psychology. Rather, as a philosophical and systematic reflection on both the human person and on society, it provides a basis for them. It examines the possibilities for an integrated psychology that draws on ethical, social, and spiritual resources.

Some IPS students, along with an international array of scholars and students, also attend the Oxford Lectures held at Blackfriars Hall under the auspices of the Institute for the Psychological Sciences. This year's summer program was entitled "Brain, Mind, and the Nature of Being". It focused on the interface between the philosophy of mind and neuroscience—their point of convergence, as well as their areas of divergence.

New Directions

During its first decade of its existence the IPS faculty and students worked together to articulate in psychological terms a Catholic understanding of the person, marriage, and family life that is grounded in Scripture and in the teaching of the Church over the past two thousand years,

and to examine the implications of this Catholic anthropology for integration in the practice of clinical psychology. Although there have been some previous efforts at Catholic integration throughout the middle part of the 20th century these efforts were limited in scope and usually the work of individual scholars rather than a more comprehensive treatment by a community of scholars. As we begin our second decade our task at the IPS could be described as moving from an oral tradition within the classroom to a written tradition which will allow this developing knowledge of integration to be shared with others in the broader and longer existing Protestant Christian efforts at integration, and with the large community of Catholic mental health practitioners who have struggled—often in a haphazard manner—to integrate a Catholic perspective into their work as mental health professionals.

One major effort that the IPS faculty and students have embarked on is a five-year project to develop a handbook of case studies which demonstrate the integrative use of traditional psychological scientific knowledge and methods along with a Catholic anthropology for the assessment, treatment planning and therapeutic treatment of clients. Once completed this handbook will be utilized through the curriculum, and our goal is that this will help our students develop a more sophisticated understanding of and ability to engage in Catholic integration both within our program, in externships, and in their careers.

Other efforts at the IPS to move from the oral to the written tradition of Catholic integration include preliminary planning for the development of an online journal which can be used by students and faculty and others interested in Catholic integration to publish articles of a theoretical and applied clinical nature. Such an on-line journal when it comes to fruition will allow for wide distribution of the work of the Institute nationally and internationally to the wider Christian world, and get it into the hands of Catholic mental health professionals throughout the world.

Over the past ten years most of our faculty have been members of the existing Christian professional associations and have been contributing to the professional journals centering on Christian integration. More recently, the faculty members of the IPS have also been instrumental in the formation of the Catholic Psychotherapy Association and a number have served as Board members and officers of this newly established professional association.

In our short existence as a central institution within the Catholic world that is examining the issue of integration, we are extremely grateful for the encouragement and support that we have received from so many of our Protestant colleagues who have pioneered this work in the broader Christian world. We look forward to a future of continuing dialogue and hope that over time the IPS and its students can make significant contributions to applied integration within clinical practice.

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