

SELECTION

POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMME IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

Suggestions to prospective applicants

Thank you for considering Stellenbosch University for your professional training in Clinical Psychology. We look forward to reading all applications. Stellenbosch University is committed to offering professional training in psychology that will equip graduates to confront the challenges and diverse issues presented by the South African Mental Health context. We invite applications from candidates with a strong academic record, a proven commitment to community involvement and empowerment through psychological interventions, and a reflexive approach to their own development and functioning.

The quality of applications is always extremely high and we can typically only accommodate between 30 and 40 applicants on the shortlist for final selection. This means that the emphasis is on inviting applicants who we consider BEST fulfil the criteria. Many very competent applicants can often not be accommodated. Every year there are applicants who have not been shortlisted who will make excellent psychologists. We are committed to go through a rigorous process to select for the shortlist those who we believe have the best chance of being selected for training at our university. This process will involve a meticulous scrutiny of each application by at least two members of the selection committee and a subsequent discussion of each and every applicant by the full selection panel

A maximum of 8 students will be invited to participate in our programme in 2023. This means that the selection process is highly competitive and that applicants inevitably experience the process as extremely stressful. Although it is impossible to remove the stressfulness from the selection experience, we have committed ourselves to a process that we consider to be thorough and sensitive, yet fair and transparent. We also do encourage you to use the selection process as an opportunity to get to know more about our programme.

In past years the following issues emerged during pre-selection:

- **Academic abilities:** We considered undergraduate and graduate marks, as well as the quality of writing in the essays. We found that the essays were often rather lean and that the writing frequently was poor. **Additionally, the yearbook of the university states that the minimum requirement for a Masters degree is obtaining 65% on Honours level.** This means that we are legally bound not to even consider applicants whose marks were below 65% on Honours level. Furthermore, the average percentage of short-listed applicants for 2021 on Honours level was 73%. This should give applicants an indication of how tough the academic competition was. We actually recommend that strong candidates consider repeating Honours courses to improve their marks.
- **Community experience:** We expect applicants to both (a) have been involved in community work in substantial ways and (b) have the ability to reflect on how this has impacted on them. We also are looking for candidates who have sophisticated insights into the socio-political issues that inform psychological practice in South Africa. In other words, we expect candidates to have community experience and to be able to theorize it.
- **Counselling experience:** We expect applicants to already have (a) had the opportunity to do counselling (group, individual or community); (b) is able to reflect on how they have experienced this on a personal level (intellectually and emotionally); and (c) is able to understand this mutual process theoretically.
- **Socio-political awareness:** We consider a clear understanding of the complexity of the South African context and the diversity of its people as a prerequisite for participating in the programme. It is therefore not sufficient to merely have community and counselling

experience: it is necessary to also understand these experiences in the socio-political context of South Africa and to be committed to make a contribution in South Africa or in Sub-Saharan Africa.

- **Self-awareness and self-reflection:** By carefully examining referees' reports and personal essays, we do consider the extent to which applicants are able to reflect on their own lives. We expect candidates to show a sophisticated understanding of how different factors in their lives have shaped them. We are not looking for specific kinds of experiences or a specific number of experiences: we are interested in a demonstrated capacity to reflect on experiences in a psychological way. In the past we have often felt that we did not know a candidate at all after reading his/her application. We are actually trying to get a sense and understanding of how applicants function on an emotional level. If you can reflect on yourself in this way, you should also be able to consider others in psychological ways.
- **Personality functioning:** We need to be clear that our short-listed applicants are emotionally stable and relatively confident. While we know that most applicants would have experienced loss, have suffered or have been traumatised in certain ways, we also need to know that losses, suffering and trauma are being dealt with in adaptive ways. We are aware of the fact that most high functioning people often feel anxious, sad and angry – it is very helpful if candidates can identify such feelings and discuss how they cope with them. We also noted that in many there applications there was no way to assess how applicants function in relationship with others – in a field where relationships are of central importance, it is crucial to make sure that we get a sense of you in relationship.
- **Referees:** We find that applicants often choose inappropriate referees (too close, too removed, too flippant etc.). Referees who know you well, are invested in your future, understand the complexities of this programme and are prepared to spend time to fill out the forms in detail make a huge difference to your application. Your choice of referees is therefore considered to be crucial in your application.
- **Incomplete applications:** In the past we have found that many applications are simply incomplete. On a more obvious level we often miss marks and referees' reports. On a more subtle level, we need every application to include information about academic functioning, history, personality, interpersonal functioning, therapeutic abilities, community service and socio-political awareness – all information asked for in the application material. If we cannot comment on these aspects of an applicant's functioning (by looking at application form, essays and referees' reports), an application simply is not giving us enough information about an applicant to know that we want to invite him/her to selection.
- **Motivation:** After reading your application, we do want to have a sense of why you want to be a psychologist. What about this specific field attracts you as a person?

We trust that these comments may be helpful to.

Ms Megan Snow

Selection Co-ordinator: MA (Clinical Psychology)