

Things to Think About When Applying to Psychology Graduate School Programs (Musings from Dr. V)

- **Documents typically requested by the schools you are applying to:**
 - Application form and fee (\$\$)
 - Graduate Record Exam (GRE) scores (\$\$)
 - Letters of recommendation (typically 3, typically from professors)
 - Curriculum Vitae (CV; a.k.a., an *academic* resume)¹
 - Personal statement¹
 - **Official** copies of transcripts (\$\$)
 - Most schools require GPAs > 3.0/3.5
 - Some schools require high grades (> B) in research methods/statistics
 - Diversity statement (less common; often included in personal statement)
 - Writing sample (less common)
- **Graduate Record Exam (GRE)**
 - Most graduate schools in psychology require GRE scores.² The GRE is an aptitude test administered by Educational Testing Service ([ETS](#)) that estimates whether one will be successful in graduate school (on average).
 - Visit the [ETS](#) website to find dates to take the test, testing centers, and resources.
 - Know **which** GRE to take: 1) *General* GRE and/or 2) *Psychology Subject* GRE
 - Some schools require the General GRE, others want the Psychology Subject GRE. Look at each school's requirements.
 - **Prepare for the GRE!** Take practice exams and buy/rent/borrow a GRE study book. [ETS](#) has many resources (e.g., free exams), so check them out!
 - **Take the GRE early.** Why?
 - You might need to retake the test, so you need time to take it again.
 - You need to account for the time it takes ETS to score your test and for them to send the scores to the schools you request they send it to.
 - If you take the GRE computer version (versus paper), your official scores are available about 10-15 days after your test date. If you take the paper test, scores are available about 5 weeks after your test date.²
 - You can send GRE scores to 4 schools for free. After this, you are charged. On the day of the test, have information about the schools you wish to send the scores to, as they will ask you for this information (if you want the free ones). You can always request scores later but take advantage of the freebies.²
- **Letters of recommendation (typically 3)**
 - Graduate programs will ask you to provide three letters of recommendation (typically, from professors).

¹ Have someone read/edit your CV and personal statement (several times, if possible).

² Things may have changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Always refer to the guidelines of the school you are applying to and the ETS website for the most up-to-date information.

- Graduate schools typically ask the letter writers to comment on your skills beyond classroom observations (e.g., ability to work in a group, work independently, self-motivated, organized, etc.).
- It is important to get chummy with faculty at your college (e.g., work in their research lab, if they have one). Good letters of recommendation will come from professors who know you **beyond the work you turned in for class**.
- When requesting letters of recommendation:
 - **ASK** your potential letter writer if they will write a letter(s) of recommendation for you. Do not assume a professor will write a letter for you.
 - Give **ample notice** for faculty to complete and send letters (e.g., request several **months** in advance).
 - Provide **detailed** instructions on how the professor should send the letter (Will it be requested electronically? Will they have to mail it? Where should they mail it? Deadlines for each school?).
 - Provide a personal statement, your C.V., and general information about the program you're applying to (e.g., program website, name of degree/concentration/program you're applying for).
- Most schools request letter writers submit letters electronically (i.e., they will get an email with instructions to upload their letter). Some will request that a paper copy be mailed.
- Schools will ask whether you want to waive your ability to read the letter. **You should waive your right to read the letter**. Otherwise, your letter writer may not write freely about your skills.
- **Research experience and extracurriculars**
 - Try to join a research lab and/or complete an independent research project. This will set you apart from other applicants.
 - Consider joining [Psi Chi](#), the international honors society in Psychology (contact Dr. Chris Aults in Psychology for membership in the King's College chapter). Membership requires a certain GPA and rank in college.
 - Look for additional extracurricular activities that will set you apart from other applicants. For example, employment/internship in a related area (e.g., a mental health facility), participating in local school clubs/events/programs, and/or volunteer work, to name a few.
- **What programs should you apply to?**
 - Choosing a program will depend on your research/career interests. For example, you might be interested in becoming a developmental psychologist or a clinical psychologist.
 - Based on your interests, look for programs that have a faculty member who shares your interests. This faculty member will be your mentor while you complete your program. It is important to find someone who will provide the support and expertise you need.
 - **Research the programs you are interested in applying to.**
 - **Look over the school and program's website THOROUGHLY!** They may have obvious answers to questions you have.

- When applying to programs, check whether the faculty member you wish to work with **is accepting graduate students into their lab** (sometimes they are not, so they will not be available to be your mentor). This information is usually available on the department/faculty's website. Email them if you can't find the information online, but make sure you've checked!! Otherwise, this might signal to them that you are not self-motivated or a problem solver (because you didn't search hard for the information).
- Some people also email faculty to ask them additional questions. Some faculty have told me they like this, while others don't. I would only email a potential mentor if you have a **very specific** question regarding their research interests or clarification about something specifically regarding their lab. Do not email to say hi and introduce yourself.
- **Clinical/Counseling folks:** look for programs that are **ACCREDITED**.
 - To become a counselor/clinician, you must apply for licensure in the state that you want to practice. Each state has different licensure requirements, but most require that you obtain your degree, whether master's or doctorate, from an **accredited** school.
 - Also keep in mind that depending on the licensure that you seek, you may have to complete additional hours being supervised post-graduation from your program to obtain licensure (e.g., licensure to be a Professional Counselor).
 - **Accreditation** means that an outside organization (e.g., [APA](#), [CACREP](#), [MPCAC](#)) has set standards for graduate programs to meet. When graduate programs are accredited by those organizations, they meet those standards. It is a third-party, quality control check of the school.
 - The American Psychological Association ([APA](#)) accredits **doctoral programs** in clinical psychology, counseling psychology, school psychology (and a combination of these programs), doctoral internships, and postdoctoral residencies (clinical/counseling/school/health). They tend to be the gold standard for any doctoral program.
 - The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs ([CACREP](#)) typically accredits **master's and doctoral programs** in counseling. CACREP seems to be the gold standard particularly for master's programs.
 - The Masters in Psychology and Counseling Accreditation Council ([MPCAC](#)) is a relatively new accrediting organization that accredits **master's** counseling and psychology programs.
 - Check your state's requirements for licensure (e.g., Does your program require accreditation and does it have to come from a **specific** accrediting organization?).
 - See resources below for more information on licensure and accreditation.
- **Additional tips for applying**
 - **This can all seem overwhelming. I suggest you:**
 - **Find schools you are interested in applying to.**

- **Make an Excel spreadsheet with school names in the rows and what they require you submit in the columns (e.g., deadlines to submit information, letters of recommendation, GRE subject/general test, etc.).**
 - **Plan when to complete each requirement for each application (e.g., when to take the subject/general GRE, requesting letters of recommendation, writing your personal statement).**
- **Add application deadlines to an online/paper calendar with reminders.**
- Apply to as many programs as possible (~15). If your goal is a PhD/PsyD, apply to several MA/MS programs as back-ups.
- There are application fees (\$30-60+), but some schools may offer waivers/assistance.
- Deadlines are **typically** December – January for admission in the Fall semester.
- Make sure your letter writers have submitted their letters prior to or on the deadline and that the school has received them. Don't pester them, but friendly email reminders are helpful.
- Be mindful of the time it takes to request GRE scores, official transcripts, etc. Start your requests for GRE scores, transcripts, and letters of recommendation early!
- **Make sure you have searched EVERYWHERE for information about the program and application process for each school. Be proactive and motivated to hunt down information on your own. This self-motivated skill is part of being a successful graduate student.**
- **Hearing back**
 - Depending on the school, there may be several rounds of interviews:
 - The first round of interviews is usually a phone or video call.
 - The second round typically involves traveling to the school and meeting with professors and graduate students (this may or may not be funded by the school you applied to).
 - Dress professionally.
 - If you're invited to interview (fingers crossed!!), **PREPARE for this interview.**
 - Create a list of questions that faculty and graduate students might ask you ("Google" potential questions) and rehearse how you would answer these questions.
 - Create and rehearse a brief statement about you, your general research interests, and career goals. We call this the "elevator speech".
 - **Questions to ask your potential mentor:**
 - How closely they work with their students (mentorship style)
 - How often the lab meets
 - How often one meets with their mentor
 - What is expected of the graduate students in the lab (e.g., lab duties)
 - Opportunities for publication and presentations at conferences
 - Opportunities to collaborate with other faculty members on research
 - **General questions to ask:**

- Types of classes offered or more information about courses offered (I recommend first searching the school's course catalog and looking at the psychology graduate classes they offer instead of asking what they offer)
 - Whether there are comprehensive exams/qualitative exams. These are typically exams that occur between earning your MA/MS and PhD
 - Typical schedules of graduate students (day and/or evening classes, 3hr/day class, etc.)
 - Financial support offered (Do they pay students a stipend? How much is this stipend and for how long is it given? Are travel stipends available for conferences? Is there a tuition waiver (i.e., do you pay for your classes)?).
- Think of additional questions that are important to you regarding your mentor and the program.
 - Read articles that your potential mentor has published; be familiar with what they are currently doing.

Applying to graduate school can be stressful, but with enough planning, organization, and self-motivation, you can do it!

General Websites and Resources

- **Timelines**
 - [American Psychological Association's \(APA\) brief timeline](#) for applying to grad school
 - [Psychology Today: So, you want to go to graduate school in psychology?](#)
- **General Guidance**
 - [Applier Beware: Answer these six questions before you apply to any psychology graduate program](#)
 - [Graduate and Postgraduate Education](#)
 - [Applying to Graduate School](#)
 - [Resources: Graduate School](#)
 - [Kisses of Death in the Graduate School Application Process](#)
- **Writing Personal Statements**
 - [Preparing your personal statement for graduate school applications](#)
 - [Organizing your personal statement: An outline to get you started](#)
 - [PDF \(p. 17\)](#)
 - [You're writing your own letter of recommendation](#)
 - [PDF \(p. 24\)](#)
 - [The Link Between Letters of Recommendation and the Personal Statement](#)
 - [PDF \(p. 18\)](#)
- **Relevant Organizations**
 - [Psi Chi International Honor Society in Psychology](#)
 - [Association for Psychological Science \(APS\)](#)
 - [American Psychological Association \(APA\)](#)
 - [American Psychology-Law Society \(APLS\)](#)
 - [APLS Student Committee and AP-LS Student Resources](#)
 - [List of Graduate Programs in Forensic and Legal Psychology](#)
- **Accreditation**
 - [APA Accredited Programs \(doctoral level\)](#)
 - [Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs \(CACREP\)](#)
 - [List of CACREP-accredited counseling programs](#)
 - [Masters in Psychology and Counseling Accreditation Council \(MPCAC\)](#)
 - [List of MPCAC-accredited programs](#)
- **PA Department of State Professional Licensing Boards & Commissions**
 - [PA State Board of Psychology](#)
 - [Psychologist](#) snapshot (degree from an APA or CPA accredited program)
 - [PA State Board of Social Workers, Marriage and Family Therapists, and Professional Counselors](#) (licensure requires a Masters or Doctoral degree from an **accredited** school)
 - [Professional Counselor](#) snapshot
 - [Marriage and Family Therapist](#) snapshot
 - [Social Worker](#) snapshot
 - [Clinical Social Worker](#) snapshot (degree from school accredited by the Council on Social Work Education)

Additional Resources and Readings

- American Psychological Association. (2007). *Getting in: A step-by-step plan for gaining admission to graduate school in psychology*. American Psychological Association.
<https://www.apa.org/pubs/books/4313012>
- American Psychological Association. (2019). Degree Pathways in Psychology. [Interactive data tool].
<https://www.apa.org/workforce/data-tools/degrees-pathways>
- American Psychological Association. (2019). *Graduate Study in Psychology, 2019 Edition*. American Psychological Association. <https://www.apa.org/pubs/books/4270104>
- Hughes, J. W. (2019). *Pathways in psychology: How psychology majors get into graduate school and launch careers*. Joel Hughes. <https://www.amazon.com/Psychology-Pathways-Majors-Graduate-Careers/dp/173360250X>
- Landrum, R. E. (2009). *Finding jobs with a psychology bachelor's degree: Expert advice for launching your career*. American Psychological Association. <https://www.apa.org/pubs/books/4313023>
- Psi Chi. (2021). *An eye on graduate school: Guidance through a successful application*. Psi Chi.
<https://store.psichi.org/an-eye-on-graduate-school-guidance-through-a-successful-application>
- Sayette, M. A., & Norcross, J. C. (2020). *Insider's guide to graduate programs in clinical and counseling psychology* (2020/2021 edition). The Guilford Press. <https://www.guilford.com/books/Insiders-Guide-Graduate-Programs-Clinical-Counseling-Psychology/Sayette-Norcross/9781462541430>
- Sternberg, R. J. (Ed.). (2017). *Career paths in psychology: Where your degree can take you* (3rd ed). American Psychological Association. <https://www.apa.org/pubs/books/4313041>