

*UMKC Department of Psychology*

**APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL:  
SURVIVAL GUIDE**

**Academic Year  
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Undergraduate Psychology Advising Office

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## I. Graduate School in Psychology

In graduate school, students focus on one specific area of psychology that interests them (e.g., clinical, cognitive, developmental, industrial-organizational, community, social, etc.). Students receive specialized training in research and/or practice in the chosen area and, depending on the program, students may be qualified to practice, teach, or continue conducting research in this area of interest.

The best source of information about these various programs is the book *Graduate Study in Psychology* published by the American Psychological Association. It lists by state most of the graduate psychology programs in the United States. It includes information about admission criteria, how many students are accepted each year, number of faculty members, and where to get more information and an application. Because it is revised every year, you can be certain that the information available will be current and up-to-date.

### Why NOT to go to Graduate School

It is generally not a good idea for students to pursue graduate school simply because they have nothing else to do after completing their undergraduate degree. Graduate school requires a strong commitment and students who are not committed perform poorly. It is also not a good idea to go to graduate school simply to avoid employment. Most successful graduate students work on their degree for more than 40 hours per week. Graduate school involves intensive study of a specific area of psychology. Therefore, having only a vague interest in psychology is usually not enough motivation for students to complete a graduate degree.

### Master's vs. Doctoral Programs in Psychology

The choice of graduate programs to apply to depends on many factors including students' area of interest, career goals, time commitment to graduate education, grades, and amount of research experience. There are several important differences between master's and doctoral programs. Master's programs typically require about 2 or 3 years to complete. Some master's programs (e.g., counseling) allow students to become licensed when they have completed the degree (by passing a state licensing exam). Master's programs sometimes require students to write and defend a thesis or pass a comprehensive exam. There are many careers in practice or industry that require only a master's degree.

Doctoral programs can take as many as 5 to 7 years to complete, require both a masters thesis and dissertation research, and are often focused on a specific area of psychology (master's programs may or may not have an area of focus). Becoming a psychologist generally requires completion of a PhD or PsyD, but many other careers in psychology do not require a PhD.

Certain master's programs may also help raise students' grade point average or provide more research experience if students do not have the minimum requirements for a doctoral program. Most master's and doctoral programs require a good background in research methods and statistics for acceptance. Students should consider applying to programs of varying competitiveness to give themselves a range of possibilities for acceptance into either master's or doctoral programs.

Students also have the option to apply to a PsyD program. The PsyD is intended to prepare graduates for careers as practicing psychologists. The PsyD offers a great deal of training in therapeutic techniques and many supervised experiences. There is less of an emphasis on research than in PhD programs, as PsyD graduates are trained to be consumers of research-

based knowledge. PhD programs are designed to train psychologists who can not only understand and apply research, but be creators of research-based knowledge. Generally speaking, PhD programs offer more funding opportunities in terms of teaching and research assistantships than PsyD programs. Typically, PsyD students finish their graduate programs in less time than do PhD students. A PsyD requires a specific number of years of coursework and practice, as well as a dissertation that usually requires that students apply research to a given problem or analyze the research literature.

## II. Criteria for Choosing a Graduate Program

There are any number of criteria people can use when trying to evaluate various graduate programs. This list is not meant to be an all inclusive, but to provide you with the most common criteria people use when choosing a graduate school. You'll find the information you need to evaluate each program in various graduate school guides and directories, as well as from the catalogs and websites of the individual graduate programs that interest you.

**Accreditation:** The American Psychological Association states that accreditation is a way to ensure academic institutions regularly review and revise their program curriculum and that the program meets nationally recognized standards. Additionally, accreditation certifies that universities are held accountable for meeting program goals and requirements.

There are two main types of accreditation: institutional and program-specific. You should determine the proper accreditation degree programs in your field. While accreditation is not so much an indicator of quality as much as process, you could face negative consequences if the program does not have accreditation. For example, students who attend an unaccredited law school may not be allowed to sit for the bar exam (whose passage is needed to be a practicing lawyer). *Note: A school that is not properly accredited may not openly volunteer this information, so dig deeply.*

**Admission Standards:** You want a graduate program with tough admissions standards; it's better to be among the select few than with a larger group that may end up lowering the quality of your graduate education. Most schools publish this kind of information, so look for the number of applicants compared to the number of acceptances. You could also look at base requirements for admission, which usually include undergraduate grade point average and standardized test scores, such as GRE scores.

**Career Assistance:** One of your main goals for earning an advanced degree most likely revolves around career advancement -- either getting a new job or entering a new field. You should examine the amount of career development and placement assistance each program provides to graduates. While this assistance should just be a small part of your overall job search upon earning your degree, it's still an important one. You should also look at where each school's graduates are working (along with their salaries, if possible).

**Cost/Financial Aid:** Ideally cost would not be a deciding factor in choosing a graduate program, but, unfortunately, for most of us this is usually an important consideration. Make sure you examine all associated costs, including tuition, books and supplies, housing, and miscellaneous fees and expenses. Even with tuition assistance, unexpected expenses can occur during your graduate school career, so do your best to be prepared. Then review the types of financial aid each program is offering you, including grants, loans, and fellowships. Don't be afraid to negotiate with your top schools; if a school really wants you in their program, they may be able to find additional resources for you.

Aside from traditional financial aid, many graduate programs offer students an opportunity to apply for graduate assistantships (GA's). A doctoral program is more likely to offer GA's; however there may be a few opportunities for masters level students to obtain an assistantship.

These positions typically require graduate students to work for various departments within the university. Employment can range from teaching or research assistants to clerical duties. In exchange, students usually receive tuition remission and a monthly stipend. Inquire with your program for more information on assistantships. Remember, since these positions often pay for one or more courses and provide a stipend, they are highly coveted. An impressive and timely application is necessary to be competitive for these positions.

**Culture:** Just as all organizations have corporate cultures, or specific ways of doing things, so do graduate schools. You need to identify schools with cultures that fit your style and comfort-level so that you'll have a better chance to excel. Some call this concept the philosophy of education. For example, we know of one program where there were major factions among faculty and students. In an environment such as this, in which groups compete for resources and recognitions, would you thrive or would you prefer a program that was more nurturing for all students?

**Degrees Offered:** This is probably the most fundamental criterion. If a graduate school does not offer the degree or certificate program you seek, then it does not make any sense to investigate the program any further. Just make sure you know the specific degree/certificate you need to take you to that next career step you are seeking. Don't compromise or consider a lesser degree.

**Faculty:** A graduate program is only as good as the faculty who teach in it. It's important to work with faculty who are respected and known in your field. You need to establish a method to evaluate each program. The most basic measure is looking at the percentage of classes taught by full-time, terminally qualified faculty. You could also investigate the reputation of the faculty by examining things such as the number of scholarly publications, the national or regional acclaim of faculty members, and/or the professional experiences of the faculty.

**Location:** Just as with your undergraduate choice, location is an important factor. Depending upon the degree you're seeking, you're going to be living in that geographic area for several years. More importantly, except for top-tier programs, the value of an advanced degree is typically strongest in the region where the school is located and known. So if you want to eventually live in the Pacific Northwest, it makes more sense to attend a graduate school in that region rather than one on the East Coast.

**Multicultural/Diversity Opportunities:** Better programs tend to be diverse because diversity of all types often leads to a broader world view. Examine both the faculty and student composition. You need to determine a mix where you'll feel most comfortable.

**Physical Facilities:** What is the condition of the building(s) of each program? Do they have all the tools you need for your specific interests? Investigate programs that stress state of the art facilities to see if they really do meet those criteria. More fundamentally, make sure the programs have the types of facilities you need. For example, if you plan to specialize in market research, you'll want a program that not only has great computer facilities, but also one that has behavioral labs for events such as focus groups.

**Reputation/Ranking:** Lots of different organizations rank graduate programs, so while rankings are an important measure of quality. You also need to investigate the source of the rankings. Examples of organizations that rank graduate programs include U.S. News and Business Week. However, ranking may not be as important as other criteria because there tend to be flaws in the ranking process, including the ability for a school to have a high ranking while the program that interests you could still be weak. Go to the UMKC Bookstore or library for a complete list of graduate school related books.

**Research/Academic Focus:** Graduate programs tend to have a specific strength or focus in one or two areas within a specific discipline, and you should fully investigate the faculty interests and research areas of each program.

**Resources:** This is sort of a catch-all category. We used to talk mainly about library resources here (number of volumes, periodicals, etc. in your field), but resources really means just about anything that supports the graduate program, including endowments and foundations that support student research and publications.

**Size:** There are two aspects of size that you should evaluate – size of the program and size of the entire university. Just as with your undergraduate school, you need to find a size that feels right for you. The size of the university is important in terms of resources available (see above). More importantly, however, is the size of the graduate program, because that is where you'll spend the bulk of your time. Examine the faculty/student ratios.

**State Regulations & Residency Requirements:** If you are looking at graduate programs at state universities, you need to examine admission requirements and costs for in-state residents versus all other applicants. If you have your heart set on a specific state university and you do not currently live in that state, you might consider relocating to that state and establishing residency there before applying to the graduate program.

**Surrounding Community:** You're going to have to live there for a number of years, so you better be able to at least tolerate the surrounding areas. What are you looking for – an urban, rural, or suburban setting? Do you want to live in a large city or small town? While this is not the most important criterion, it is something significant to consider.

**Information obtained from:**

Considering Graduate School. Retrieved on the Internet at:

<http://www.psychology.ilstu.edu/undergrad/gradschool/index.html> Oct 19, 2006.

Graduate School and Careers in Psychology. Retrieved on the Internet at:

<http://www.rider.edu/suler/gradschl.html#areas> Oct 19, 2006.

Hansen, R. Criteria for Choosing a Graduate Program Randall. Retrieved on the Internet at:

[http://www.quintcareers.com/graduate\\_school\\_criteria.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/graduate_school_criteria.html) Oct 19, 2006.

Kuther, T. What is the Difference Between a PhD in Psychology and a PsyD?

<http://gradschool.about.com/od/psycholog1/a/phdpsyd.htm> Sept. 15, 2006.



## Different Divisions within Psychology

Psychologists in selected subfields have the option not only of teaching (sharing knowledge) and research (generating knowledge) but also of working in settings in which they apply their knowledge. These subfields include Clinical Psychology, Counseling Psychology, Forensic Psychology, Health Psychology, Industrial/Organizational Psychology, Community Psychology, and Sports Psychology (see below).

### Applied Psychology

***Clinical Psychologists*** assess and treat people with psychological problems. They may act as therapists for people who are experiencing normal psychological crises (e.g., grief) or for individuals suffering from chronic psychiatric disorders. Some Clinical Psychologists are generalists who work with a wide variety of populations, while others work with specific groups such as children, the elderly, or those with specific disorders (e.g., eating disorders). They are trained in universities or professional schools of psychology. Clinical Psychologists work in academic settings, hospitals, community health centers, or private practice.

***Counseling Psychologists*** do many of the same things that Clinical Psychologists do; however, Counseling Psychologists tend to focus more on persons with adjustment problems rather than on persons suffering from severe psychological disorders. They may be trained in psychology departments or in education departments. Counseling Psychologists are employed in academic settings, college counseling centers, community mental health centers, and private practice.

***Health Psychologists*** are concerned with psychology's contributions to the promotion and maintenance of good health and the prevention and treatment of illness. They may design and conduct programs to help individuals stop smoking, lose weight, manage stress, and stay physically fit. They are employed in hospitals, medical schools, rehabilitation centers, public health agencies, academic settings, and private practice.

***Forensic Psychologists*** do clinical work in corrections settings; some work as consultants to trial lawyers; some serve as expert witnesses in jury trials; some formulate public policy on psychology and the law. Some Forensic Psychologists have PhDs in Clinical Psychology; others have both PhDs in Clinical Psychology and JDs in law. There are several graduate programs in the country where you can earn the two degrees at the same time.

***Industrial/Organizational Psychologists*** (or *I/O Psychologists*, as they are usually called) are concerned with the relationships between people and their work environments. They may develop new ways to increase workplace productivity or be involved in personnel selection. They are employed in business, government agencies, and academic settings.

***School Psychologists*** are trained in psychology and education that is designed to prepare the individual for careers and research in mental health, child learning, behavior and development, and curriculum and instruction. School psychologists are also proficient in assessment, educational interventions and school systems. Schools psychologists provide counseling and emotional support to students, and also work to enhance their academic capabilities through creating a supportive and successful educational environment. Additionally, school psychologists work with student families, teachers, administrators, and members of the community in a variety of settings, including schools, universities, and private practice.

***Sports Psychologists*** are concerned with the psychological factors that improve athletic performance. They also look at the effects of exercise and physical activity on psychological adjustment and health. Sports Psychologists typically work in academic settings and/or as consultants for sports teams.

## Research Psychology

***Educational Psychologists*** are concerned with a range of activities from initial design through development and evaluation of both materials and procedures for education and training. Such positions exist in public schools, in the military, in private research and development companies, and in industrial concerns. They may deal with analyzing education and training needs, with developing materials for instruction in various media, with designing the best conditions for instruction, and with evaluating the effectiveness of instructional programs. Educational Psychologists are typically trained in departments of education (vs. departments of psychology) and employed in colleges and universities.

***Cognitive Psychologists*** are concerned with what organisms know and how they come to know it. They study how people perceive objects and events, how they can store past events in memory, how they transform and manipulate knowledge by thinking, and how they analyze their experience to emerge with new and abstract notions. They also investigate mental processes associated with many everyday activities from pattern recognition to complex problem solving. Some of the areas of interest are sensation & perception, attention, memory, language, problem solving, and decision making. Cognitive processes are often applied to other fields of psychology such as developmental, social, education, and clinical psychology. Cognitive Psychologists are typically employed in academic settings.

***Experimental Psychologists*** are a diverse group of psychologists who do research in the most basic areas of psychology (e.g., learning, memory, attention, cognition, sensation, perception, motivation, and language). Sometimes their research is conducted with animals instead of humans. Most are faculty members at colleges and universities. A research oriented doctoral degree (Ph.D.) is usually needed.

***Environmental Psychologists*** are concerned with the relations between psychological processes and physical environments ranging from homes and offices to urban areas and regions. Environmental psychologists may do research on attitudes toward different environments, personal space, or the effects on productivity of different office designs.

***Community Psychologists*** are concerned with improving individual and community well being by studying and addressing social and community problems at levels including and beyond the individual (e.g., groups, organizations, systems). Community psychologists often engage in action research directed towards social change. Community psychologists are employed in a variety of settings including community organizations, government offices, planning and research units, healthcare facilities, and colleges and universities.

***Developmental Psychologists*** study how we develop intellectually, socially, emotionally, and morally during our lifespan. Some focus on just one period of life (e.g., childhood or adolescence). Developmental psychologists usually do research and teach in academic settings, but many act as consultants to day care centers, schools, or social service agencies.

***Neuroscientists*** (a newer term for *Biopsychologists* and *Psychobiologists*) investigate brain-behavior relationships. Beginning a Decade of the Brain (1990-2000), neuroscience is a huge and growing research area to which psychologists contribute. These psychologists study both very basic processes (e.g., how brain cells function), sensory systems, memory, and more observable phenomena such as behavior change as a function of drug use. Some continue their education in clinical areas and work with people who have neurological problems.

***Psychometric (Quantitative) Psychologists*** are directly concerned with the measurement of behavior (mostly through the use of tests) and the design of research investigations. Such a psychologist may be analyzing complex sets of data; designing, developing pilot testing, or validating versions of intelligence, personality, or aptitude tests; or deriving new statistics with which to analyze data. The psychometric psychologist is typically well-trained in mathematics, statistics, and in the programming and use of computers.

***Social Psychologists*** study the ways in which the social context affects the behavior of the individual and groups in the real world and the laboratory. Some of the topics of interest to Social Psychologists are attitudes, aggression, prejudice, love, and interpersonal attraction. Most Social Psychologists are faculty in colleges and universities, but an increasing number are being hired by hospitals, federal agencies, and businesses to perform applied research.

### III. What To Do To Get In

#### GPA

Grade point average is one index that many graduate schools take very seriously. Obviously, the higher your GPA the better your chances of getting in. Competitive programs may look for GPAs at 3.5 or higher. Less competitive programs may accept 3.0. Start looking into the requirements for programs that you are interested in so that you have time to raise your GPA if necessary.

#### Letters of Recommendation

Many graduate schools weigh letters very highly. Strong letters of recommendation can compensate for GPAs and GREs that are a bit weak. Your letters of recommendation could become one of your greatest assets! Talk to the faculty and get involved with their research. The better they know you, the more likely they can write a convincing letter. When you ask a professor to write a letter for you, be sure to give the professor some written information about yourself, the courses you took with him/her, your grades, any activities you undertook in our department or on campus, etc. The next section describes in more detail ways in which you can work towards getting a truly excellent letter.

#### Tips on Obtaining Letters of Recommendation from Faculty Members

##### Who should you ask?

- Ask a professor who knows you well enough to comment on your potential to be successful in graduate school. A professor who had you in one large lecture class may not remember you and therefore is not a good choice.
- Plan ahead for getting a letter from someone by giving them a chance to get to know you. For example, in classes, take opportunities to interact with professors (ask questions, communicate interest, etc.), complete any extra assignments in the course to demonstrate your abilities, take research or special topics credit with them, etc. Professors are more likely to say yes to writing for you and to be able to give you a strong letter, if they know you on a personal level!
- Asking professors from outside of the Department of Psychology is also acceptable.

##### How should you ask?

- Be very courteous. Faculty are addressed as Dr. or Professor.
- Faculty are not required to provide references for you, so remember that you are asking them to do you a favor.
- Ask if the professor would be willing to write a letter or fill out a recommendation form for you and, if they have the time to do it, within the time frame in which you need the letter.
- Remember to ask if he/she is willing to write you a GOOD letter of recommendation - that way you know there won't be any surprises or disappointments if the professor doesn't know you well enough to write a good letter.

## When should you ask?

- Ask the professor what time frame they need to write your letter. Allow the professor at least 3-4 weeks to write them.
- Keep in mind they are likely writing letters for other students as well, and also are trying to maintain their busy schedules.

## What materials do professors need in order to write your letter of recommendation?

- Provide each faculty with an organized packet of materials containing:
  - Stamped, addressed envelopes to all the schools you are applying
  - If the letter should be returned to you (to be sent with your application materials) make sure the name of the school and your name are on the envelope
  - A copy of your curriculum vita
  - A copy of your personal statement
  - Any forms that schools may have to supplement the letter of recommendation. Fill out as much information on the forms that you can so the professor can concentrate on writing the letter (e.g., your name of letter writer, his or her job title, contact information, etc.)
    - If you are asked to indicate whether or not you waive access to the letter of recommendation, it is recommended that you DO waive the right. Answering otherwise gives the appearance of not trusting your letter writer or the information the letter may contain, and it decreases the effectiveness of the letter
  - GPA, GRE scores, and the types of programs you are applying to are also helpful (example: Clinical Ph.D. programs, School Psychology Masters programs, etc.)
  - A copy of your transcript so the professor can see the courses you've taken and how you've performed
  - A paragraph explaining your educational/career goals is also informative
  - Keep in mind that some professors may ask for additional information, so be sure to ask if they have any specific requests. Also, be sure to provide them with your contact information in case they need to follow up with you

### Information obtained from:

Graduate School and Careers in Psychology. Retrieved on the Internet at:  
<http://www.rider.edu/suler/gradschl.html#areas> Oct 19, 2006.

## Research with Our Faculty

In our department you have the unique opportunity to work closely with professors on research projects. Take advantage of this! Volunteer your time to work with a professor or apply for a Psych 490 Directed Individual Research. When professors get to know you in this capacity, they are in a better position to write a very strong letter of recommendation. Successfully completing these projects also demonstrates to graduate schools that you are a motivated person who can work independently. As a Psych 490 student, you may gain experience in: data collection, entry, and analysis; completing literature reviews; and sometimes writing abstracts or articles.

In the past, students have presented papers at conferences, published articles, and presented at SEARCH ([www.umkc.edu/searchsite/index.asp](http://www.umkc.edu/searchsite/index.asp)). Many graduate programs will be impressed by this! It is unusual for undergraduates to do this sort of thing. Graduate programs that emphasize experimental research may be very impressed by your having been actively involved in research, especially if the research led to a conference presentation or a publication. Programs that emphasize training in counseling (and not experimental research) may be impressed by projects involving case studies, literature reviews, and experiential learning even if these projects did not lead to a publication or conference presentation.

## Directions for 490 Application

- Before applying for a 490 position, please contact the faculty member that you are interested in working with to see if they are accepting 490 applications. Please keep in mind that most faculty members require 490 students to have Psych 316 and Psych 302WI completed with a grade of B or better.
- If you apply to more than one 490 position, you must fill out a different 490 application for each professor (for example, if you are applying to three 490 positions, then you will need to fill out three applications).
- Once you fill out an application, please turn in your application to Room 124 and put the application in the faculty's mailbox that you are applying to work with.
- After 2 weeks, if you have not heard back from faculty member, please send an email to him or her to check the status of your application.
- A copy of the Psych 490 application can be found at: <http://cas.umkc.edu/psyc/Participating.asp> under the heading "Be a Student Researcher"

## Field Work and Other Practical Experiences

Some graduate programs may be impressed by your having had some substantial practical experience in a setting related to their program. For example, experimental programs may find it appealing that a student helped out with a professor's research project. A developmental program may be impressed by someone who worked with developmentally handicapped children. Clinical and counseling psychology may think it is important that a student worked in a mental health setting.

You also can volunteer on your own or look for part time/summer jobs related to your area of interest. However, there is no guarantee that a graduate program will highly value this experience. Those programs that emphasize research training (including clinical psychology programs) may be more concerned about your academic achievements than your practical experiences.

## Required Courses

Many programs will require that you have taken undergraduate courses in psychology and a certain amount of credits in psychology. Courses such as statistics and experimental psychology often are required. If you will be completing the major in our department, you probably will have no problem with this. But specialized programs may require specialized courses.

## Using the Shot Gun Method

To maximize the possibility of getting in, apply to *many* schools - maybe 12 or more. Apply to a few really outstanding programs: who knows, you may get lucky! Also apply to a few programs that are less competitive so you'll be guaranteed of receiving at least one or two offers! And don't be too upset if you do get rejected, because the odds are that some programs WILL reject your application.

If you're willing to go to another part of the country, you will have a wider selection of schools to apply to and a better chance of being accepted

## Going for a Visit and Interviewing

If possible, go see the school even before you know whether or not you are accepted. Talk to the faculty and students. It may help you decide whether or not you want to be there. It also may help you make an impression on them. Making a personal contact can be very effective. Definitely try to visit the programs that accept you! Talk to the faculty and find out everything you can about the program. Do they feel like people you could work with? Make a point of talking to beginning and advanced students - they will tell you things that the faculty may not.

## General GRE Test (Graduate Record Examinations)

### What is it?

- The GRE General Test measures verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning, critical thinking, and analytical writing skills that have been acquired over a long period of time and that are not related to any specific field of study. Beginning August 1, 2011, ETS will offer the revised GRE General Test. The changes to this test include more of a focus on reading and critical thinking skills, according to the GRE web site.
- **Verbal Reasoning** — The revised test will no longer include antonyms and analogies. The new test will have more reading comprehension questions, as well as text completion and sentence equivalency questions. The skills measured in this test include the test taker's ability to analyze and evaluate written material and synthesize information obtained from it.
- **Quantitative Reasoning** — Skills measured include the test taker's ability to understand basic concepts of arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and data analysis. It also measures the ability to reason quantitatively and solve problems in a quantitative setting. The revised test will include multiple choice questions that have more than one correct answer, requiring the test taker to select all of the correct answers in a question. Additionally, some questions will require takers to enter a numeric value into an answer box, rather than choosing from a list of possible answers. Lastly, this section will also include an on-screen calculator to reduce the emphasis on computation.
- **Analytical Writing** — The skills measured include the test taker's ability to articulate complex ideas clearly and effectively, examine claims and accompanying evidence, support ideas with relevant reasons and examples, sustain a well-focused and coherent discussion, and control the elements of standard written English. The revised test will examine the same skills, but questions will be more focused in order to avoid generalization.

### Computer-Based General Test content and structure

- The revised General Test has six sections.
- In addition, one unidentified pretest section may be included, and this section can appear in any position in the test after the analytical writing section. Questions in the pretest section are being tested for possible use in future tests, and answers will not count toward your scores.
- An identified research section that is not scored may also be included, and this section would always appear in the final section of the test. Questions in the research section are included for the purpose of ETS research, the makers of the GRE, and answers will not count toward your scores.
- Total testing time is up to three hours, not including the research section. The directions at the beginning of each section specify the total number of questions in the section and the time allowed for the section.
- The analytical writing section is always first. For the Issue task, two topics will be presented and you will choose one. The Argument task does not present a choice of topics; instead, one topic will be presented.



- The verbal and quantitative sections may appear in any order, including an unidentified verbal or quantitative pretest section. Treat each section presented during your test as if it counts.

### Typical Computer-Based GRE General Test:

Section	Number of Questions	Time
Analytical Writing	1 “Analyze an Issue” task	45 minutes
Analytical Writing	1 Analyze an Argument Task*	30 minutes
Verbal (two sections)	About 40 questions	30 minutes
Quantitative	About 40 questions	45 minutes
Unscored**	Varies	Varies
Research***	Varies	Varies

\* You will be given one topic for each essay question.

\*\* An unidentified verbal or quantitative pretest section may be included and may appear in any order after the analytical writing section. It may count as part of your score.

\*\*\* An identified research section that is not scored may be included, and it is always at the end of the test.

### How to register for the GRE (Computer-based):

*Register to Test in the U.S., U.S. Territory, or Canada:*

- There are three ways you can register for the computer-based General Test:
  - Internet: [Online Registration](#) (credit card only)
  - Phone: Use American Express, Discover, JCB, MasterCard, VISA, or a voucher number. Call the test center directly or the Prometric® Candidate Services Call Center Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. - 8 p.m., Eastern Time (New York), (excluding holidays), at **1-800-GRE-CALL** (1-800-473-2255) or 1-443-751-4820.
  - You can also register with Testing Services on Campus located at 4828 Troost, Suite 206; 816-235-1635
    - A confirmation number, reporting time, and the test center address will be given to you when you call.
    - If you use a Telephone/Teletypewriter (TTY), call 1-800-529-3590.
  - Mail: Download and complete the [Authorization Voucher Request Form](#) (PDF) found in the Bulletin. Mail the appropriate payment and voucher request form to the address printed on the voucher, allowing up to 4 weeks for processing and mail delivery.
    - When you receive your voucher, call to schedule an appointment.
    - An appointment to test must be made prior to the expiration date on the voucher.
    - If you lose your voucher, [contact the GRE Program](#). Only one replacement will be issued.

### **Fees for the General Test**

- General GRE TEST Fees: Computer-Based and Paper-Based Testing is \$160 U.S., U.S. Territories\*, and Puerto Rico

### **Test preparation**

- Free General Test Preparation Materials are available on the GRE Website (Free Test Prep, Sample Questions, Writing Topics, Tips)
- UMKC also offers GRE Prep courses throughout the academic year. Look for flyers and email postings.

### **Canceling your scores**

- Computer-based General Test:
  - At the end of the test, before you view your scores, you will have the option to cancel your scores. This is the only time your scores can be canceled. Canceled scores cannot be reinstated, and no refunds will be issued.
  - Institutions will not receive any information about your canceled scores or about any previous scores you may have on file.

### **Score report mailing dates**

- Computer-Based General Test: Score reports are mailed to you and up to 4 institutions approximately 10 to 15 days after you take the test. These institutions must be designated on test day. Please allow sufficient time for mail delivery from Princeton, New Jersey, USA.

### **Additional score reports**

- Additional score reports (ASRs) can be ordered by mail or by phone.
- By Mail or Fax: The fee is U.S. \$23 per score recipient. Requests are processed within 10 working days after receipt. Once a request and fee is mailed or faxed, it cannot be canceled, changed, or refunded.
- By Phone: You can only order by phone if you: tested on or after October 1, 2001 call from a touch-tone phone pay by credit card (American Express, Discover, JCB, MasterCard, or VISA).
  - There is a U.S. \$12 service fee per call and a U.S. \$20 fee per score recipient for up to 8 recipients. To request more than 8 score recipients, please call again.

### **Subject GRE Test**

- In addition to the general test, some schools may require that you also take a psychology subject test to be admitted.
- Most editions of the test consist of approximately 205 multiple-choice questions. Each question in the test has five options from which the examinee is to select the one option that is the correct or best answer to the question.

- Some of the stimulus materials, such as a description of an experiment or a graph, may serve as the basis for several questions.
- The questions in the Psychology Test are drawn from courses of study most commonly offered at the undergraduate level within the broadly defined field of psychology.
- Questions may require recalling factual information, analyzing relationships, applying principles, drawing conclusions from data, evaluating a research design, and/or identifying a psychologist who has made a theoretical or research contribution to the field.

### **When do people take the Subject Test?**

- The Subject Tests are given at paper-based test centers worldwide three times a year in: November, December, and April.

### **Fees for the Subject Test**

- \$140 U.S., U.S. Territories, and Puerto Rico

### **Registering for the Subject Test**

- Register early to receive your free test preparation materials in time to prepare for the test. Paper-based Subject Test administrations are offered at [test centers](#) worldwide. You can register for a paper-based administration online, mail, or by phone.

### **More tips**

- See [www.ets.org/gre](http://www.ets.org/gre) for more information, registration, and study materials!
- MOST Psychology graduate programs only pay close attention to your Quantitative and Verbal scores.
- It is very unwise to take the GREs cold. Prepare for it! Bookstores sell manuals that describe strategies for taking the test and provide sample exams. There also are classes you can take, such as the Kaplan preparatory GRE course.
- Study books, CD-ROMs, etc. are available at the UMKC bookstore or your local bookstore.
- Usually programs will use a cut off score. If you don't get above a certain score, they may not even look at your application.
- *Graduate Study in Psychology* lists the average GRE scores for students who are accepted into specific programs. A few less competitive graduate schools may not have a cut off score or may not require you to take the GREs at all, but most will.
- The GRE is a computer-adapted test, meaning that the verbal and quantitative portion of the exam will start with questions of medium difficulty. Correct answers will lead to more difficult questions that are worth more points, conversely, incorrect answers will lead to easier questions that are worth fewer points. This is a way for the computer to figure out your skill level. Therefore it is important to get as many correct questions as possible in the beginning. So don't worry if you find yourself getting bombarded with difficult questions. It means you're doing well!

## Test Taking Tips

1. Before the test, relax. Research shows a person who is relaxed usually does much better than a person who is tense during an exam. Get enough sleep before the D-Day. Also if your GRE is in the morning, take a light breakfast. A heavy one might make you drowsy.
2. Learn the section directions in advance of taking the test. Use the time saved during the test to work on questions.
3. The GRE Test is about optimizing. Maximizing your marks in a given period of time is your aim. So don't rush it as that might cost you valuable points.
4. Be especially careful in the first portion of every section. Successful answers to the earliest questions will lead to higher scores.
5. You can write on the scratch paper provided. Use the process of elimination to cross out wrong answers; do scratch work.
6. Easy questions usually precede hard ones.
7. Double check your work and answer before you click on the screen bubble. You cannot skip any question and you cannot go back after you've answered a question.
8. Don't spend too much time on any one question. You should spend only seconds on the easiest questions, and hesitate to spend more than 1-2 minutes on even the hardest ones.
9. Practice, practice, practice!
10. Read the words in the question carefully. Be sure to answer the question asked and not the question you recall from a practice test.
11. Know the Question Types to Expect on the GRE: analogies, sentence completion, reading comprehension, math multiple-choices, and quantitative comparisons.
12. The GRE Test does not penalize you for wrong answers. So never leave any question unanswered.
13. No matter what happens, DON'T PANIC. Keep your cool all the time, even when you don't know the answer. Once you panic, you might even answer the easiest questions incorrectly. If you feel yourself getting tense, take a short break, ask for a glass of water, close your eyes, take deep breaths and calm yourself down.
14. Bring a couple of IDs to the test center. Make sure at least one of the pictures actually looks like you. Also bring any authorization voucher you may have received from the Educational Testing Service.

### Information obtained from:

[www.ets.org/gre](http://www.ets.org/gre)

GRE Test Tips and Techniques Test Tactics and Sectional Strategies for the GRE. Retrieved on the Internet at:

<http://www.testinfo.net/gre/gre-tips.htm> Oct 19, 2006.

GRE Preparation Tips. Retrieved on the Internet at:

<http://gradschool.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.syum.com%2Fgre%2Ftips.html> Oct 19, 2006.

## Computer-Based Testing

Computer-Based Testing at UMKC is generally offered three days each week (Monday, Thursday and Saturday) with either a morning or afternoon appointment available. Most tests require a four-hour block of testing time, but program specifics should be checked. Morning appointments begin at 7:30 a.m. and afternoon appointments begin at 11:30 a.m. Candidates are asked to arrive at the Testing Center 20-30 minutes before their scheduled appointment time for preliminary check-in procedures.

Registration for testing may be completed by calling the Testing Center at (816)235-1635 or by calling the 1-(800) number specific to each program. Payment via credit card secures the appointment time. Payment by check or money order requires the candidates to register in person. When registration is complete, a confirmation number is issued, but an admission ticket is not sent. Please note that all programs have cancellation and re-scheduling policies that are associated with various fees.

On the day of testing, candidates must provide proof of identification. While a government issued I.D. is standard, program specifics should be consulted. Pencils and scratch paper will be provided, as no personal belongings are allowed in the testing room.

Score reports for CBT exams are provided at the conclusion of the test with "official score reports" sent within two weeks of the test date.

### ETS Tests that can be completed at UMKC:

- GRE: Graduate Record Examination; General Examination ([www.gre.org](http://www.gre.org))
- The PRAXIS SERIES: Professional Assessments for Beginning Teachers ([www.teachingandlearning.org](http://www.teachingandlearning.org))
- TOEFL: Test of English as a Foreign Language ([www.toefl.org](http://www.toefl.org))
- GMAT: Graduate Management Admission Test ([www.gmat.org](http://www.gmat.org))
- SAT/CTY: Scholastic Assessment Test/Center for Talented Youth
- AICPA: American Institute of Certified Public Accountants ([www.aicpa.org](http://www.aicpa.org))
- CIRM: Certified in Integrated Resource Management ([www.aicpa.org](http://www.aicpa.org))
- CPIM: Certified in Production and Inventory Management ([www.apics.org](http://www.apics.org))
- NAPLEX: National Association of Pharmacy Licensing Exam
- NBPME: National Board of Podiatric Medical Examiners
- NBPTS: National Board for Professional Teaching Standards ([www.nbpts.org](http://www.nbpts.org))
- Individuals with speech or hearing impairments may call Relay Missouri at (800) 735-2966 (TT) or (800) 735-2466 (voice).

#### Information obtained from:

UMKC Counseling, Health, and Testing Center: <http://www.umkc.edu/chtc/>

## Your Personal Statement

- Graduate schools require a personal statement as part of the graduate school application.
- Plan to spend extensive time preparing your personal statement- you will go through many, many drafts!
- The personal statement will likely include information on why you would like to attend their program, what makes you a good candidate, and how well you match with their program.
- Include information on research, relevant job and/or volunteer experience.
- Be sure to ask for feedback from a faculty member or someone with good writing skills. The Writing Center and the Career Center will also review your statement.
- There probably is wide variation in how graduate schools react to your written personal statement. Some might take it quite seriously; others may not pay much attention. Play it safe. Spend some time on it and prepare a well thought out letter. Avoid platitudes like "I'm really interested in psychology" or, for a counseling or clinical program, "I want to work with people." Would you be applying for graduate school if you didn't feel that way?
- If you really want to do it right, TAILOR your letter for each program you apply to. Say something about your background, your accomplishments, what exactly about psychology interests you, what you plan to do in the future BUT ALSO STATE EXACTLY WHY IT IS YOU ARE APPLYING TO THAT PROGRAM. What is it about the program that attracts you? How will it benefit you, and what do you have to offer it? Be as specific as possible. If you are interested in one or more of their faculty member's work, say so! If you are interested in a particular program, say so! And explain why you are interested!
- Keep the letter short - maybe two or three pages, TYPED. Experiment with being both creative and informative. Ask friends and professors for comments on what you have written.

**Information obtained from:**

Graduate School and Careers in Psychology. Retrieved on the Internet at:  
<http://www.rider.edu/suler/gradschl.html> Oct 19, 2006.

## More Tips on Writing Your Personal Statement

- Attend to each program's instructions carefully.
- Follow all instructions (length, answer every question asked).
- Don't repeat information that is in other parts of your application (GRE scores, GPA).
- Highlight your unique qualities and strengths as an applicant.
- Be honest and realistic- don't exaggerate!
- Emphasize information that makes you stand out from other applicants.
- Make sure it's related to psychology and/or career-goals.
- Discuss the match between you and the program.
- Become knowledgeable of the program you are applying to.
- Don't provide detailed personal information.
- Check for grammatical errors. Use spell check.
- Go to the UMKC Career Center and Writing Center to have an advisor review it.
- For more information, see *Getting In: A Step-by Step Plan for Gaining Admission to Graduate School in Psychology*, pp. 133-144

## Writing Your Statement of Purpose for Grad School

- The graduate school statement of purpose is your chance to demonstrate your unique qualifications for and commitment to your chosen field by discussing those experiences, people, and events that compelled you to pursue it.
- That's a lot to accomplish--especially in the typical two-to-three pages allowed for your statement. You can find the key to success by focusing on a few illustrative incidents as opposed to giving a superficial overview. Remember: Detail, specificity, and concrete examples will make your essay distinctive and interesting. Generalities and platitudes that could apply to every other grad school applicant will bore. If you use them, you'll just blur into the crowd.

### The Do's

- Unite your essay and give it direction with a theme or thesis. The thesis is the main point you want to communicate.
- Before you begin writing, choose what you want to discuss and the order in which you want to discuss it.
- Use concrete examples from your life experience to support your thesis and distinguish yourself from other applicants.
- Write about what interests you, excites you. That's what the admissions staff wants to read.
- Start your essay with an attention-grabbing lead -- an anecdote, quote, question, or engaging description of a scene.
- End your essay with a conclusion that refers back to the lead and restates your thesis.
- Revise your essay at least three times.
- In addition to your editing, ask someone else to critique your statement of purpose for you.
- Proofread your personal statement by reading it out loud or reading it into a tape recorder and playing back the tape.
- Write clearly and succinctly.

### The Don'ts

- Don't include information that doesn't support your thesis.
- Don't start your essay with "I was born in..." or "My parents came from..."
- Don't write an autobiography, itinerary, or résumé in prose.
- Don't try to be a clown (but gentle humor is OK if done correctly).
- Don't be afraid to start over if the essay just isn't working or doesn't answer the essay question.



- Don't try to impress your reader with your vocabulary.
- Don't rely exclusively on your computer to check your spelling.
- Don't provide a collection of generic statements and platitudes.
- Don't give mealy-mouthed, weak excuses for your GPA or test scores.
- Don't make things up.

**Information obtained from:**

Abraham, L. Writing Your Statement of Purpose for Grad School. Retrieved on the Internet at:  
<http://wpersonalstatementww.accepted.com/grad/.aspx> Oct 19, 2006.

*Getting in: A Step-by Step Plan for Gaining Admission to Graduate School in Psychology* (1996)

Handbooks/Grad School: Grad School Survival Guide SS11  
06/21/11 TH

## Tips on Creating an Academic Vita

- An academic vita is a summary of your professional training and background; it serves much the same purpose as a résumé in the business world. In other words, a vita is an autobiographical account that provides the information on which a preliminary decision is made whether to admit you to a program or hire you for a job. Largely on the basis of your vita -- and the cover letter accompanying its submission -- your application will be rejected outright, put into a doubtful category, or considered worth exploring. If the latter occurs, your vita has succeeded.
- The main thing to keep in mind when preparing a vita is that it will stand in for you during the initial phase of screening hundreds of applicants. It conveys who you are and what the graduate program or employer will get if you are chosen. You should not depict yourself as a good student or an outstanding research assistant, but as a promising professional.
- Although your vita should follow a fairly standard format, it should also distinguish you from the other applicants whose materials float with yours in the Sea of Anonymity. Include all information that you honestly believe will help someone judge whether you are qualified, but keep your vita focused. It is better to develop several versions of your vita than to send an unfocused vita with every application.

## Several DOs and DON'Ts in Vita Preparation

- DO make your vita a clear and concise summary of your professional qualifications. Like any good writing, every word should count.
- DO try to obtain copies of several vitae from individuals who are at your stage of professional development or slightly ahead. One of the best ways to construct a vita is by seeing how others have done it.
- DO take the time to create an elegant and inviting format, and be sure to print the final product on high quality paper. Style matters, and your vita should appear professional, uncluttered, and friendly to the eye.
- DO be sure to check the vita carefully for mistakes and typographical errors. Without exception, it must be absolutely error-free.
- DO have your faculty adviser, colleagues, family, and friends look over your vita before you send it out. They will undoubtedly spot weaknesses you have overlooked and may be able to suggest ways of overcoming them.
- DON'T give the appearance of padding your vita by including such things as extra-wide margins, high school accomplishments, or excessive detail about your research and teaching experience (e.g., details associated with running an experiment, such as "I contacted participants, scheduled them for sessions...").
- DON'T list irrelevant personal information such as height, weight, health, or military status. Listing your age, marital status, or the number of children you have is optional (unfortunately, such information can invite discrimination, particularly against female applicants), and excessive details should be avoided (e.g., names and ages of children). Listing hobbies and outside interests is also optional and should only be done if you feel it will enhance your image as a well-rounded professional.

- DON'T list categories that have only one item (with one exception: a section entitled "Publication" is acceptable for listing a single publication).
- DON'T use category subheadings that are more ambitious than their content (e.g., "Articles, Publications, and Grant Proposals" followed by only one grant proposal). Later in your career, you can add some of these sections (for example, "Professional Activities" might include editorships, memberships in academic or grant-reviewing committees, consulting work, and so on).

**Information obtained from:**

Tips on creating an academic vita. Retrieved on the Internet at:  
<http://www.socialpsychology.org/vitatips.htm> Oct 19, 2006

Handbooks/Grad School: Grad School Survival Guide SS11  
06/21/11 TH

## Vita Template

Jane A. Student

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Street, City, State, Zip  
Phone: 555-555-5555  
Cell: 555-666-6666  
[email@email.com](mailto:email@email.com)

### Education

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Ph.D., Psychology, University of Minnesota, 2006  
Concentrations: Psychology, Community Psychology  
Dissertation: A Study of Learning Disabled Children in a Low Income Community

M.A., Psychology, University at Albany, 2003  
Concentrations: Psychology, Special Education  
Thesis: Communication Skills of Learning Disabled Children

B.A, Psychology, California State University, Long Beach, CA, 2000

### Experience

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Instructor, 2004 - 2006  
University of Minnesota  
Course: Psychology in the Classroom

Teaching Assistant, 2002 - 2003  
University at Albany  
Courses: Special Education, Learning Disabilities

### Experience and Skills

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Extensive knowledge of SPSSX and SAS statistical programs.

#### Presentations:

Smith John (2006). The behavior of learning disabled adolescents in the classrooms. Paper presented at the Psychology Conference at the University of Minnesota.

#### Publications:

Smith, John (2005). The behavior of learning disabled adolescents in the classroom. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 120 - 125.

## Grants and Fellowships

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RDB Grant (University of Minnesota Research Grant, 2005), \$2000  
Workshop Grant (for ASPA meeting in New York, 2004), \$1500

## Awards and Honors

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Treldar Scholar, 2005 - University of Albany  
Academic Excellent Award, 2003 - California State University - Long Beach, CA

## Skills and Qualifications

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Microsoft Office, Internet  
Programming ability in C++ and PHP  
Fluent in German, French and Spanish

## References

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References available upon request.

**Information retrieved from:** Retrieved on the internet from:  
<http://jobsearch.about.com/library/cvsample/blcvacademic.htm> Sept. 13, 2010

## CV Development – *From the UMKC Career Services Center*

### Introduction

A curriculum vitae, or "CV", is a professional document designed to illustrate the depth of your professional training, skills, and accomplishments in a particular field. CV's commonly encompass a description of your educational background, research experience and professional accolades.

### How Does a CV Differ From a Resume?

CV's provide much more information than the typical one page resume. Depending on the degree of experience, the length of a CV can range between two to eight pages. The notable differences can be attributed to the functional underpinnings between the two documents. As noted in our [resume development](#) section, a resume should be a brief and succinct summarization of your qualifications to capture the attention of an employer. With a CV you have the freedom to include detailed information that allows employers to gain a broader understanding of you as a promising professional. CAUTION: Although you may be elated at the thought of avoiding the frustrating process of summarizing yourself in one short resume page, you must remember that submitting a CV instead of a resume is not always appropriate.

### When Should I Submit a CV?

Many people find themselves submitting a CV when applying for positions in education or health care industries. Typically, CV's are used by people who have obtained/pursuing a doctorate or master's degree. Applicants are encouraged to contact the employer or admission committee to ask if a CV is recommended if it is not clearly stated.

### What is Included in a CV?

- Details on educational background including degrees and certificates accrued, master's thesis and/or doctoral dissertation, honors and awards, and GPA
- Summary of relevant work experience
- List of publications authored
- Licenses, awards, classes taught
- List of research papers/posters presented at conferences
- Professional association membership(s)
- Grants and Fellowships

#### Information retrieved from:

Retrieved on the internet from: [http://www.career.umkc.edu/?p=students\\_cv#included](http://www.career.umkc.edu/?p=students_cv#included)  
Sept. 13, 2010

## Action Verb List

Field Area/Skills	Examples of Associated Action Verbs
<b>Management/Leadership skills</b>	Achieved, administered, arranged, articulated, assigned, attained, authored, chaired, competed, conceived, conducted, contracted, convened, coordinated, created, delegated, designed, developed, directed, earned, effected, employed, executed, facilitated, influenced, initiated, instituted, instructed, intervened, invented, investigated, managed, mastered, modeled, organized, oversaw, planned, presented, presided, protected, recommended, regulated, represented, resolved, shaped, solved, specified, succeeded, supervised, visualized, and <u>more</u> .
<b>Research &amp; Writing Skills</b>	Analyzed, annotated, appraised, assessed, authored, briefed, calculated, catalogued, categorized, charted, coded, collected, compared, compiled, composed, computed, conducted, consolidated, contacted, corresponded, created, critiqued, defined, derived, designed, determined, developed, devised, diagnosed, directed, discovered, dispensed, displayed, distributed, drafted, edited, elicited, estimated, evaluated, examined, exhibited, expanded, experimented, explored, forecasted, formulated, identified, illustrated, inquired, inspected, interpreted, interviewed, inventoried, investigated, measured, modeled, observed, outlined, predicted, presented, processed, produced, published, questioned, recorded, regulated, reported, reproduced, researched, reviewed, revised, rewrote, searched, solicited, solved, studied, summarized, surveyed, synthesized, tested, and <u>more</u> .
<b>Teamwork &amp; Interpersonal Skills</b>	Articulated, arranged, briefed, clarified, collaborated, communicated, competed, confronted, contacted, convened, coordinated, delegated, elicited, employed, encouraged, endured, enlisted, exchanged, explained, facilitated, fostered, influenced, initiated, inquired, instructed, interpreted, intervened, interviewed, introduced, listened, mediated, motivated, negotiated, participated, represented, resolved, responded, shaped, shared, solicited, supported, and <u>more...</u>
<b>Financial Skills</b>	Acquired, activated, administered, analyzed, applied, assessed, briefed, calculated, catalogued, categorized, channeled, coded, compiled, computed, conducted, defined, delivered, derived, designed, developed, devised, drafted, formulated, implemented, inspected, installed, mastered, monitored, operated, processed, programmed, protected, provided, published, recorded, regulated, repaired, reported, reproduced, responded, searched, shared, simulated, solved, supported, systematized, tested, trained, translated, tutored, updated, wrote, and <u>more...</u>
<b>Technical Skills</b>	Acquired, activated, administered, analyzed, applied, assessed, briefed, calculated, catalogued, categorized, channeled, coded, compiled, computed, conducted, defined, delivered, derived, designed, developed, devised, drafted, formulated,

	implemented, inspected, installed, mastered, monitored, operated, processed, programmed, protected, provided, published, recorded, regulated, repaired, reported, reproduced, responded, searched, shared, simulated, solved, supported, systematized, tested, trained, translated, tutored, updated, wrote, and <u>more...</u>
<b>Teaching/Training Skills</b>	Adapted, advised, assigned, coached, collaborated, communicated, conducted, counseled, critiqued, demonstrated, designed, developed, directed, educated, encouraged, evaluated, examined, facilitated, guided, implemented, imposed, influenced, informed, inquired, instilled, instituted, instructed, introduced, investigated, judged, lectured, modeled, monitored, motivated, organized, outlined, oversaw, participated, performed, persuaded, planned, prepared, prescribed, presented, programmed, questioned, reported, researched, responded, reviewed, revised, rewrote, scheduled, studied, supervised, taught, trained, tutored, and <u>more...</u>
<b>Sales &amp; Public Relations Skills</b>	Articulated, communicated, contacted, convened, corresponded, delivered, demonstrated, developed, dispensed, displayed, earned, elicited, encouraged, entertained, exhibited, expanded, facilitated, formulated, increased, influenced, informed, introduced, inventoried, listened, located, maintained, marketed, motivated, persuaded, promoted, publicized, purchased, recommended, recruited, represented, responded, routed, scheduled, shaped, shared, solicited, sought, stimulated, succeeded, suggested, supported, surveyed, targeted, and <u>more...</u>
<b>Administrative/Detail Skills</b>	Administered, arranged, assembled, briefed, catalogued, categorized, coded, collected, compiled, contacted, coordinated, corresponded, distributed, edited, executed, grouped, identified, inventoried, located, monitored, regulated, responded, retrieved, scheduled, summarized, supported, systematized, updated, verified, and <u>more...</u>

**Information retrieved from:**Retrieved on the internet from: <http://www.wellesley.edu/CWS/students/actionverbs.html>

Sept. 13, 2010



## Planning for Graduate School: A General Timeline of Events

Now that we've given you an abundance of information about what to do to get into graduate school, the question now is: when should you begin doing all of it? Below is a suggested timeline of events to help prepare you for applying to graduate school.

### Freshman Year:

- Students should complete General Psychology 210 as soon as possible because it is a prerequisite for all other psychology courses.

### Sophomore Year:

- Students should take the WEPT exam and complete Psychology 316 Quantitative Methods in Psychology in the first semester of their sophomore year. Complete Psychology 302WI Experimental Psychology in the second semester of sophomore year to get a background on research methods.

### Junior Year:

- If Psychology 302WI Experimental Psychology has not yet been taken - take it first semester of your junior year.
- Start getting involved in research. Here at UMKC we offer a Directed Research course (Psychology 490) in which students work with a member of the faculty and create a research project. This is especially important because many graduate programs place a lot of emphasis on having research experience. In addition, it is beneficial to begin getting connected with faculty members so when it comes time to getting letters of recommendation, you will have professors who can better gauge your likelihood for success in graduate school based on your work performance and direct observation of skills.
- Look into different conferences in which to present your research. UMKC has SEARCH (Students Engaged in Artistic and Academic Research) every year, which is a student research convention for all disciplines. In addition, many of our undergraduate students present at the annual Great Plains Student Psychology Conference. Having poster presentations will not only boost your vita, but also give you much needed practice since you will probably be expected to present research findings during your graduate school career.
- Join Psi Chi, the International Honor Society for Psychology Students. If you do not meet the requirements, you can join Psychology Club and continue working towards meeting the membership requirements for Psi Chi. You can also become a student member of APA if you have a faculty sponsor. Involvement in professional organizations shows a genuine interest in your field and can help you to start networking.
- Start looking into what specific areas of psychology interest you. The website <http://www.psywww.com/careers/specialt.htm> offers a description of areas of specialization in graduate school. Having an idea of what field you want to go into will make looking for a graduate school much easier.
- Begin looking into graduate schools that have the type of programs you would like to go into (Clinical, Counseling, etc.). Knowing what the admissions requirements are for those programs and what the application process is like will save you a lot of stress later. The book *Graduate Programs in Psychology* is a helpful resource. It lists every psychology graduate program in the United States and is updated yearly.

### Summer between Junior and Senior year:

- Begin studying for the GRE. This is a very important test and not adequately preparing for it can limit the programs you can apply to. If you do not meet the minimum GRE requirements for a program, your application may not even get looked at. This is why giving yourself enough time to study for it is imperative.
- Request information from graduate programs that you are interested in, and look at the faculty at those programs. You will want to choose a program that has faculty that are involved in the type of research you would like to conduct.
- Of the schools that you are interested in, begin looking at their requirements for admission: what GRE scores do you need, what is the GPA requirement, do they require a subject GRE test, and what materials must you turn in with your application? Begin writing your personal statement.
- Sign up to take the GRE in late summer or early fall.

### Fall of Senior Year:

- Contact faculty members to write letters of recommendation for you. Be sure to give them enough time.
- Continue conducting and presenting research. The more poster presentations or manuscripts you have to put on your vita, the better your chances of admission will be.
- Take the GRE! Give yourself enough time to retake the test before application deadlines in case you do not meet the requirements for schools you would like to attend.
- Complete your applications. Most programs have deadlines in December or January, so don't wait to the last minute to get your materials together. Mail out all applications at least a couple weeks early. Be sure to type and proofread your applications in addition to photocopying all materials you send for your records.

### Spring of Senior Year:

- Many PhD programs will notify you around January or early February of your acceptance or rejection. Some MA programs may have later application deadlines and may not notify you of their decision until March or April.
- If accepted, decide which school out of your options would be best fit for you, and then notify that program that you will be accepting their offer. Contact other programs that you were accepted to in order to inform them that you will be declining their offers. Doing so allows those programs adequate time to make an offer to someone on the waiting list.
- In the event that all your applications are rejected, consult with your faculty about what your options are. In some cases it might be helpful to take a year off from school and work on boosting your vita. It might be beneficial to retake the GRE, obtain more research experience, or take non-degree related graduate classes to prove your ability to succeed at the graduate level. It is always possible to reapply to graduate school, so even if you are not accepted one year, you can do things to increase your chances for admission the following year.

**\*\*Remember to start early. Don't wait until the last minute!\***

#### **Information retrieved from:**

Retrieved on the internet from: <http://www.psywww.com/careers/time-grd.htm> Sept. 24, 2007

## **What Do Graduate Programs Look For In Clinical Applicants?**

*Last summer, just before the deluge of applications came flooding in, University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill director of clinical psychology Mitch Prinstein, PhD, answered questions about how to stand out in the highly selective application process.*

*Offering two main tracks to a clinical psychology doctorate, adult and child/family, UNC is a highly sought after program. Last year, of the 450 students who applied to the program, 25 were selected for on-campus interviews, and nine ultimately matriculated.*

### **As the director of clinical psychology, at what stage do you see an application?**

In our program, one tenure-track faculty member reviews every application, and from there, we create a short list of about 25 percent of the applications. Each faculty member reviews candidates from the short list.

### **What does your program evaluate in the first hurdle of the application process?**

Primarily two things: Academic potential as measured by grade point average (GPA) and Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores and match to our program values and research.

### **How important is an applicant's psychology GRE score?**

Not very important. It offers a sense of someone's general breadth of knowledge in psychology. But, it's not directly related to their potential to succeed as a clinical scientist. The psych GRE score usually will not get you in, and it will not keep you out.

### **What reasons might keep an applicant from making it past the second hurdle, of deciding whether there's a fit with the program's values and training experiences?**

That's really going to pertain to whether the applicant matches the general emphasis of the program's training, and has research interests that match an available mentor.

### **What do you look for in an applicant's research background?**

Some independent research experience, an ability to think like a scientist, someone who can generate hypotheses, who is familiar with research literature, who can understand the limits to prior research and maybe someone with some ability for scientific writing.

### **Can you give an example of "thinking like a scientist"?**

Some applicants indicate a lot of enthusiasm for an area of research, but not knowledge of how to conduct good research. For example, they might indicate that they're very excited about working with children or adolescents, and that they think it's important to study internalizing symptoms. This is fairly broad. That type of essay will not stand out as much as an applicant who expresses such enthusiasm, but also is knowledgeable about some of the current theories and methodological approaches that are used to study specific developmental psychopathology symptoms. Applicants who can think like scientists usually express ideas that begin to sound like a hypothesis, their ideas convey an appreciation of the way in which constructs might be associated with each other.

### **What do you think is the value of working as a research assistant?**

It's usually an opportunity to get a very detailed and thorough experience in how research is conducted, both the specific logistical issues and seeing a research project move from the conceptual stage to the methodological design to sometimes even manuscript preparation. These are the exact tasks that students will need to know how to perform competently when they're grad students.

**What do you look for in a letter of recommendation?**

A letter that can help to put that applicant's strengths into a context, and can give more specific examples of how this applicant differs from other intelligent, enthusiastic and conscientious students. A letter might indicate that a student is particularly adept at statistics, or has strong organizational abilities, or is able to think theoretically at a sophisticated level that's beyond their peers.

**What do you look for during the on-campus interview?**

Since that's occurring later on in the application process, you hope students have been able to focus their research interests as they've gone through the application process to get a little clearer picture of what they would like to do if they were in your lab in particular. It's good if, at that point, applicants are able to listen to what research is ongoing, and then talk in an informed way about how they think their research might be a match.

**What are potential turnoffs during the interview process?**

We're very committed to maintaining a very collegial, respectful and very comfortable environment here, so, we're very much on the lookout for arrogance, egos and competitiveness. Those are the kinds of qualities we're very much steering away from.

**Why is it a good idea for an applicant to identify a potential mentor?**

For a couple of reasons. It's usually a way to more clearly illustrate the match and articulate exactly what their interests are. Also, it's good to have an advocate, someone who throughout the application process is thinking that you're the person they'd like to have work with them, someone who can really champion your application.

**What else should applicants know about the process?**

Once they have started to receive offers, I'd ask students to work as quickly as they can to decide which offer they might not want, and to please not hold more than two offers at a time.

**Information Retrieved from:**

Retrieved on the internet from: <http://apa.org/gradpsych/2007/11/cover-gradprograms.aspx>  
Sept. 13, 2010

## IV. Helpful Articles

### How to Avoid the Kisses of Death in the Graduate School Application Process

By Drew C. Appleby and Karen M. Appleby – Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis; (Appleby, D.) Idaho State University (Appleby, K.) \*

Numerous authors offer advice to undergraduate psychology majors about what they **should do** to gain admission to graduate programs. However, few authors advise students about what they **should not do** when applying to graduate school and, when they do, few support their advice with data. We surveyed the chairs of graduate school admissions committees in psychology about the contents of graduate school applications that **decreased** chances for acceptance (i.e., kisses of death or KODs). A qualitative analysis of these surveys yielded the following six categories of KODs. Although the KODs identified in this study reflect unwise choices on the part of applicants, we believe many of them resulted more from a lack of appropriate advising and mentoring than from a lack of applicants' intelligence. Unless undergraduate psychology programs provide appropriate advising and mentoring concerning graduate school culture and the requirements of the graduate school application process, their majors are likely to commit these KODs. For example, an unmentored psychology major may interpret a personal statement at face value by perceiving it as an opportunity to share personal (i.e., private) information with the members of a graduate admissions committee. Unless applicants know that a personal statement should address issues such as research interests and perceived fit with a program, they may misinterpret its purpose and write personal statements that inadvertently doom their applications. Similarly, an unmentored student may interpret a letter of recommendation as a request for information from a person who knows her/him well and can vouch for her/his admirable traits and strong values (e.g., a family member or a member of the clergy). The purpose of our study was to remedy these unfortunate situations by providing undergraduate psychology majors with advice that will enable them to avoid the KODs in the graduate school application process.

A full-text copy of the article whose results are summarized in this document (see its reference below) can be accessed at:

[www.leaonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1207/s15328023top3301\\_5](http://www.leaonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1207/s15328023top3301_5)

#### Personal Statements

- **Avoid references to your mental health.** Such statements could create the impression you may be unable to function as a successful graduate student.
- **Avoid excessively altruistic statements (e.g., "I just want to help people.").** Graduate faculty could interpret these statements to mean you believe a strong need to help others is more important to your success in graduate school than a desire to perform research and engage in other academic and professional activities.
- **Avoid providing excessively self-revealing information.** Faculty may interpret such information as a sign you are unaware of the value of interpersonal or professional boundaries in sensitive areas.
- **Avoid inappropriate humor, attempts to appear cute or clever, and references to God or religious issues when these issues are unrelated to the program to which you are applying.** Admissions committee members may interpret this type of information to mean you lack awareness of the formal nature of the application process or the culture of graduate school.

### Letters of Recommendation

- **Avoid letters of recommendation from people who do not know you well, whose portrayals of your characteristics may not be objective (e.g., a relative), or who are unable to base their descriptions in an academic context (e.g., your minister).** Letters from these authors can give the impression you are unable or unwilling to solicit letters from individuals whose depictions are accurate, objective, or professionally relevant.
- **Avoid letter of recommendation authors who will provide unflattering descriptions of your personal or academic characteristics.** These descriptions provide a clear warning that you are not suited for graduate study. Choose your letter of recommendation authors carefully. Do not simply ask potential authors if they are willing to write you a letter of recommendation; ask them if they are able to write you a strong letter of recommendation. This question will allow them to decline your request diplomatically if they believe their letter may be more harmful than helpful.

### Lack of Information About the Program to Which You Are Applying

- **Avoid statements that reflect a generic approach to the application process or an unfamiliarity with the program to which you are applying.** These statements signal you have not made an honest effort to learn about the program from which you are saying you want to earn your graduate degree.
- **Avoid statements that indicate you and the target program are a perfect fit if these statements are not corroborated with specific evidence that supports your assertion (e.g., your research interests are similar to those of the program's faculty).** Graduate faculty can interpret a lack of this evidence as a sign that you and the program to which you are applying are not a good match.

### Poor Writing Skills

- **Avoid spelling or grammatical errors in your application.** These errors are an unmistakable warning of substandard writing skills, a refusal to proofread your work, or your willingness to submit careless written work.
- **Avoid writing in an unclear, disorganized, or unconvincing manner that does not provide your readers with a coherent picture of your research, educational, and professional goals.** A crucial part of your graduate training will be writing; do not communicate your inability to write to those you hope will be evaluating your writing in the future.

### Misfired Attempts to Impress

- **Avoid attempts to impress the members of a graduate admissions committee with information they may interpret as insincere flattery (e.g., referring to the target program in an excessively complimentary manner) or inappropriate (e.g., namedropping or blaming others for poor academic performance).** Graduate admissions committees are composed of intelligent people; do not use your application as an opportunity to insult their intelligence.

#### Information Retrieved from:

\*Retrieved on the internet from: [http://www.psichi.org/pubs/articles/article\\_613.aspx](http://www.psichi.org/pubs/articles/article_613.aspx)

Sept. 15, 2010

## **Applying to Graduate School in Clinical Psychology: Advice for the Aspiring Applicant**

by [Katherine A. Schoeneman](#) and Thomas J. Schoeneman - University of Nebraska-Lincoln (Schoeneman, K.); Lewis & Clark College (Schoeneman, T.)

*Applying to doctoral programs in clinical psychology is a time-intensive and often mystifying process. This article outlines the steps involved in successful applications: gaining necessary experience, choosing programs, submitting applications, and following up on submitted materials. Prior to the application process, students should focus on coursework and grades as well as research and work experiences. The application process should begin about 18 months before the date of enrollment. Several sources and strategies are given that are helpful in selecting programs to apply to. We also describe strategies for collecting the relevant application materials, including application forms, GRE scores, undergraduate transcripts, a vita, a personal statement, and letters of recommendation. Following-up to be sure that all materials have arrived is essential.*

Facing the graduate school application process can feel intimidating and overwhelming. While navigating this process, it seems that there is never enough information or advice on how to proceed or succeed. While this article provides information on applying specifically to clinical psychology doctoral programs, much of this information may prove useful for applicants to other psychology doctoral programs (e.g., cognitive, social, counseling, etc.). It is no secret that the competition during the graduate school application process is fierce in clinical programs. Most APA-accredited clinical psychology doctoral programs receive over 200 applications a year and accept approximately 6 to 8% of these (Norcross, 2000). The following information is meant to help demystify the application process and offer guidance to the aspiring applicant on how to become prepared and qualified.

### **Gaining Experience**

The majority of successful applicants will have been working on their own professional development for numerous years, whether they are aware of it or not. For some, the experience that is gained in coursework, research, and work prior to applying for graduate school is just a normal part of undergraduate or career activities. For others, however, opportunities may be less abundant, collaboration with faculty may be more difficult, or the decision to apply may come later, so professional development activities will have to be actively sought out. There are three important areas of experience that, if properly cultivated, will improve your graduate school applications: courses, research, and work.

#### **Coursework and grades**

Taking a variety of psychology courses shows a breadth of education within the discipline. In addition, having earned good grades and maintained a high grade point average (GPA) is essential. Graduate programs examine your overall undergraduate GPA, your psychology GPA, and your GPA over the final two years of college. There is no strict cutoff for deciding what qualifies as an adequate GPA. Sometimes those with weaker GPAs still have effective applications if they are strong in other areas. Most graduate programs publish the average GPA (and GRE) statistics for accepted applicants in past years, which can usually be found on program websites or in program recruitment material. This may be a good guideline you can use to evaluate the quality of your own GPA.

#### **Research experience**

It is essential to have gained research experience prior to graduate school. All graduate programs, except perhaps those in professional schools of psychology, involve research activities as a core element of graduate education. Furthermore, most graduate school advisors want students who will be capable of conducting research and contributing ideas relatively independently. An applicant who has been involved in research projects, even if the projects



are not in the desired area of graduate study, is an applicant who has gained knowledge and experience in research processes and methodology, and who can work collaboratively with faculty and peers. To become an even better applicant, it is impressive to have presented research at scientific conferences prior to graduate school.

### **Work experience**

It is not essential to have worked in a clinical psychology setting prior to applying to graduate school. However, some relevant background is always beneficial, so look into paid or volunteer work experience--or take a psychology internship class as an undergraduate--that will allow you to work in an applied psychology setting. Whether you chose a medical hospital, psychiatric hospital, group home, clinic, after-school program for children, research setting that involves clinical participants, or any other setting that allows you to work with people and gain experience, it will help your application.

### **Choosing Graduate School Programs**

It is beneficial to begin "comparison shopping" for graduate programs about a year-and-a-half prior to your desired start date. Therefore, if you wish to begin graduate school in September 2007, then you should begin examining graduate programs in January or February 2006. There are two excellent resources that thoroughly profile accredited clinical psychology doctoral programs, including information on admissions criteria, acceptance rates, faculty research interests, and clinical opportunities. The *Insider's Guide to Graduate Programs in Clinical and Counseling Psychology* (Sayette, Mayne, & Norcross, 2004) is updated nearly every year with a rotation of the authorship order. In addition, the American Psychological Association (APA) publishes a yearly review of accredited programs (APA, 2005).

### **Narrowing the list of potential schools**

Research interests, clinical opportunities, program reputation, and geography are common factors used to narrow the pool of programs to which you apply. If you have clearly defined research interests, such as forensic psychology and risk assessment, then you will need to locate programs that have faculty working in this area. The above-mentioned books offering department profiles can help in this respect. Another method for finding faculty in your desired area is to take note of who is publishing related material and where they hold faculty positions. Similarly, if you wish to gain specific clinical experience in graduate school, such as learning certain therapeutic orientations or working with specific populations, then you will require programs that meet these needs. Again, refer to department profiles, program websites, and printed recruitment material.

A program's reputation is more difficult to assess and can be done in numerous ways. Internet searches yield a variety of program rankings. For example, the Social Psychology Network (1997) ranks clinical psychology programs using average scores of graduates based on the Examination for Professional Practice in Psychology ([www.socialpsychology.org/clinrank.htm](http://www.socialpsychology.org/clinrank.htm)). In addition, U.S. News & World Report (2004) sells their rankings of graduate programs ([www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/grad/rankings/hea/brief/cps\\_brief.php](http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/grad/rankings/hea/brief/cps_brief.php)). Faculty in your desired specialty area may know which graduate programs are highly regarded in the field. Finally, the role of geography may or may not impact your choice of potential graduate schools. Applicants must evaluate their own preferences in this regard.

### **Requesting materials**

An increasing number of programs offer all of their recruitment information over the Internet and require applicants to submit their applications online. Other programs have not yet gone paperless, and so you will have to request their materials through the mail. Discovering which graduate programs operate in which manner is currently a matter of looking through a large number of websites. As the submission date approaches, it is also essential that you confirm that the application materials you initially downloaded or requested are the most updated versions, as most programs update their forms periodically.

### **Submitting the Application**



Each program will clearly list all the required application materials. This typically includes an application form, official grade transcripts, Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores, a curriculum vita, a personal statement, and multiple letters of recommendation, though more may be required. Given that the competition for clinical psychology doctoral programs is so steep, it is recommended that you apply to numerous programs. Based on the odds alone the 6 to 8% acceptance rate an applicant who applies to 20 schools should get accepted to 1 or 2. However, applicants must evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses based on comparisons to a program's average statistics and by soliciting feedback from undergraduate faculty. Then, applicants should choose which programs and how many to apply to based on their own qualifications.

### **The application form**

Make sure all of your information is accurate and professional. If your email address or telephone number changes in the middle of application reviews, you will either have to call every program to update your contact information or you will not be accessible. Also, should the graduate faculty choose to invite you to an interview or conduct a phone interview, it makes a much better impression if your outgoing telephone answering machine is professional and your email address is tasteful. For example, having "hotbabe" or "partyanimal" in your email address is not going to present a mature and professional image.

### **Graduate Record Examinations (GREs) and transcripts**

Take the GREs as early as possible so that there is plenty of time to retake them, if necessary, and to have your scores submitted to the graduate programs. A minimum of six months in advance of the application deadlines is recommended. Nearly all clinical psychology graduate programs require the General GRE, while only some require the Psychology Subject GRE. Official grade transcripts should be requested from your undergraduate institution at least two months before the application deadline. Finally, you should never assume that these official documents will successfully make it to their destination. In other words, always call the graduate program to confirm that they have received your GRE scores and grade transcripts with enough time to have them resent if they did not arrive.

### **Curriculum vita**

Your vita is your professional résumé—a record of your professional experiences thus far. Polish it, get feedback from undergraduate faculty and on-campus writing and career centers, and revise it accordingly (e.g., see Landrum, 2005, for advice on preparing a curriculum vita).

### **Personal statement**

Begin writing your personal statement early so that you have plenty of time to solicit feedback and make changes repeatedly (e.g., see Bottoms & Nysse, 1999, for information pertaining to writing a personal statement). This statement should be personalized (but not overly personal) and professional. You should highlight your experience and qualifications in a manner that sells yourself. It is essential to identify your specific goals for graduate school and the specific faculty with whom you'd like to work. Your statement is also a reflection of your writing skills and organizational skills. Again, get feedback on your drafts from faculty advisors and campus resources such as writing centers and career placement offices.

### **Letters of recommendation**

Recommendation letters may be one of the most important elements of your application to graduate school programs because they reflect your ability to work professionally with peers and faculty, thus hinting at how you will work as a graduate student. It is essential to have strong letters of recommendation from faculty with whom you have worked closely; a mediocre letter does just as much damage as a bad letter (e.g., see Rewey, 2000, for guidance on securing good letters of recommendation). Therefore, it is essential that you get involved in projects outside of the classroom so that professors can get to know you individually. Graduate programs require multiple letters and most of them should come from people within the field of psychology.

### **Following Up After Submission**

Once you've sent your application, either electronically over the Internet or by track-and-confirm postal mail, your work is not done. First, it is essential that you track everything you've submitted and not assume that it will arrive safely in the correct location. This means that you should call the school and ask if your file is complete. Only when a real person tells you that all required documents and forms have been received and are in your file can you trust that it is true. In the meantime, keep tracking, keep resending if necessary, and keep calling.

In addition, the applicant to clinical psychology doctoral programs hopes to make the first cut and be invited for an interview. Nearly every clinical program requires an interview; most do this in person while a few allow telephone interviews. If you are invited to interview, it means that you appeared to be qualified on your paper application. The interview is a way for the program to evaluate you in person and make the final decision on whom to accept into the program. It also allows you to evaluate the department and faculty first hand. All costs associated with getting to the interview are usually the responsibility of the applicant. Some programs will have current graduate students host applicants, while others will require that applicants pay for their own lodging. Interview etiquette is important, as this is your first and sometimes only chance to make a good impression. It is a professional and an academic situation. Be polite. Wear a suit. Ask questions. And despite your exhaustion and stress, attend to the things around you: Try to get a feel for the program, the mood of the current graduate students, the level of collaboration among the faculty, and the locale. The program is interviewing you but you are also interviewing the program.

### **If at First You Don't Succeed . . .**

. . . definitely consider trying again. But first, evaluate your application credentials and materials with an objective second party. Then use the time you have until the next application deadlines to turn any weaknesses into strengths. In particular, it may be beneficial to get a paid or volunteer position as a research assistant at a local university or medical center. There is no such thing as too much research experience and it pays to cultivate relationships with other potential writers of strong letters of recommendation.

### **The "Finish Line"**

Applying to doctoral programs in clinical psychology is hard work, requiring many hours of dedication, attention to detail, and persistence. In this way, the application process is a lot like graduate school. When you have negotiated all of the challenges of the application process, you will have accomplished something: congratulate yourself. Then, get ready to take on your new challenges.

#### **Information Retrieved from:**

Retrieved on the internet from: [https://www.psichi.org/Pubs/Articles/Article\\_540.aspx](https://www.psichi.org/Pubs/Articles/Article_540.aspx) Sept. 15, 2010

Handbooks/Grad School: Grad School Survival Guide SS11

06/21/11 TH

## Graduate Admissions in Psychology: I. The Application Process

by [John C. Norcross](#), Jessica L. Kohout, and Marlene Wicherski - University of Scranton (Norcross); American Psychological Association (Kohout); Cambridge, MA (Wicherski)

*This article summarizes select characteristics of graduate programs and departments in psychology across the United States and Canada in an effort to assist students and their advisors to make informed, evidence-based decisions about graduate admissions. The data are drawn from the 2005 edition of Graduate Study in Psychology and are based on 495 institutions, 601 departments, and 1,970 programs. Here, in Part I, we focus on the application process, specifically student enrollment, application methods and fees, application deadlines, admission criteria, Graduate Record Examinations (GREs), and grade point averages (GPAs). [Part II](#) will appear in the Spring 2006 issue of Eye on Psi Chi and will focus on acceptance rates, tuition costs, and financial assistance.*

Graduate education in psychology is large, vital, and thriving. Approximately 27% of undergraduate psychology majors enroll in further education within two years of receiving their degree (Tsapogas, 2004). More than 40,000 full-time students are enrolled in approximately 2,000 psychology graduate programs. The largest subfields of clinical and counseling psychology in the discipline are slated for continued growth (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2004), and graduate programs in health, cognitive, community, industrial-organizational, neuroscience, and neuropsychology are increasing. Psychology has become one of the top PhD-granting fields in science (National Opinion Research Center, 2003), and there are at least an additional 1,000 doctors of psychology (PsyDs) granted annually (APA, 2005).

Since 1967, the American Psychological Association's (APA) *Graduate Study in Psychology* has been a premier resource for graduate school applicants and faculty advisors alike. *Graduate Study in Psychology* presents comprehensive information on graduate programs in the United States and Canada that are publicly designated as psychological in institutional brochures and catalogs. Listed American institutions must have earned full accreditation by one of the six regional accrediting bodies, and all departments must meet a series of criteria to establish that they are, in fact, psychological in nature. All information is provided voluntarily by department self-report: "The American Psychological Association (APA) is not responsible for the accuracy of the information reported" (APA, 2005, p. v).

Periodic statistical analyses of the *Graduate Study in Psychology* data have illuminated the status of graduate education and chronicled changes in the discipline. Our need for updated information on graduate study has intensified in direct proportion to the growing number of graduate programs in psychology and their expanding diversity, such as the proliferation of PsyD programs (e.g., Norcross, Castle, Sayette, & Mayne, 2004) and neuroscience programs (e.g., Stricker, 2004).

This article, the first in a two-part series, summarizes select characteristics of graduate programs and departments in psychology and systematically translates this information into advice for prospective graduate students and their advisors. Our intent is to assist all involved in making informed, evidence-based decisions about graduate admissions.

Following a brief review of our methodology, we consider, in order, student enrollments, application methods and fees, application deadlines, admission criteria, and the ever-popular GREs and GPAs. We begin each section with a question that students typically ask about the graduate admissions process.

### Our Methodology

***Where did you get these numbers and percentages?*** Our data were drawn from the 2005 edition of the Graduate Study in Psychology (APA, 2005), which reports information from the 2003-04 academic year. Data were collected electronically for both entire departments and individual graduate programs on a structured questionnaire. The APA Research Office and the APA Education Directorate collaborate on the online instrument and the resulting database.

A total of 495 institutions, 601 separate departments, and 1,970 individual graduate programs in the United States and Canada were included in the analysis. These numbers represent a 79.4% response rate from graduate psychology departments (601 of 757 identified

departments). The data set was large and inclusive: All 50 states, Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia, and eight Canadian provinces were represented.

### Student Enrollment

**How big are graduate psychology departments?** [Table 1](#) displays the mean and median numbers of enrolled students in graduate departments in psychology for the 2003-04 academic year. Here and subsequently, we refer to "master's-only departments" as those awarding graduate degrees solely at the master's level and "doctoral departments" as those awarding solely doctoral degrees as well as those awarding both master's and doctoral degrees.

With regard to the size of the student body, doctoral departments average approximately 104 full-time students and 40 part-time students. Master's-only departments average approximately 39 full-time students and 33 part-time students. There is a far higher proportion of part-time students in the master's-only departments.

With regard to the ethnicity of incoming students, the percentage of first-year doctoral students who are ethnic minorities has steadily increased over the years, now reaching 27.3%. Likewise, the percentage of first-year master's students who are ethnic minorities has steadily increased to 21.4%.

These numbers represent a triumph for psychology and higher education. Psychology as a science and as a profession will be well-served by the rising percentage of ethnic minorities and women in graduate education. At 68%, psychology continues to be one of the science fields with the highest representation of women among new doctorates (Burrelli, 2004).

### Application Methods and Fees

**How do you apply to graduate school and how much will it cost?** A slim majority of 51% of graduate departments in psychology offer graduate applications online. Specifically, 56% of doctoral departments and 41% of master's-only departments had online applications in 2003. Thus, you can expect to file approximately one-half of your graduate applications online.

The average application fee was \$35 for master's departments ( $SD = 16$ ;  $Mdn = 35$ ) and \$47 for doctoral departments ( $SD = 16$ ;  $Mdn = 50$ ; Canadian fees were converted to U.S. dollars). At the lowest end of the fee range were 4% of the departments that charged nothing; at the high end, 1% of departments charged \$100. Thus, you can expect to pay handsomely for the privilege of applying to graduate school—\$35 to \$50 per application, on average.

### Application Deadlines

**When are the applications due?** Our research has shown that three-quarters of the deadlines for submitting graduate applications fall between January 15 and March 1 (Norcross, Hanych, & Terranova, 1996).

However, there are a couple of systematic differences in deadlines that merit discussion. First, doctoral programs consistently require that application materials be received several weeks earlier than master's programs. The median deadline for doctoral programs is February 1 and for master's programs it is March 1. Second, APA-accredited clinical psychology programs tend to have the earliest deadlines. Practically all of these programs post deadlines between December 15 and March 1 ( $Mdn =$  January 15), notably earlier than other types of graduate programs.

Thus, you can expect to submit your applications between December 15 for doctoral clinical programs and March 1 for master's-level programs. Sooner is always better; do not procrastinate.

### Admission Criteria

**On what basis do graduate schools admit students?** Departmental representatives rated the importance of various criteria in admissions decisions at their respective departments on a three-point scale where 1 = low, 2 = medium, and 3 = high. The average importance ratings of these admissions criteria are presented in [Table 2](#) for both master's-only departments and doctoral departments.

As seen in [Table 2](#), the top rated variables for doctoral programs are letters of recommendation, personal statements, GPA, interview, research experience, and GRE scores. All receive ratings of 2.50 and higher on the 3-point scale, indicative of high importance. By

contrast, extracurricular activity, clinically related public service, and work experience receive mean ratings between low importance (1) and medium importance (2). They are valued significantly lower in the admissions decisions.

Thus, the implications for enhancing your application are clear: secure positive letters of recommendation, write compelling personal statements, maintain your GPA, ace the preadmission interview, secure research experience, and prepare thoroughly for the GREs. At the same time, being heavily involved in student organizations and campus activities does not carry nearly as much weight as these other criteria.

Several differences between master's departments and doctoral departments emerged in these results, as in previous editions. One striking disparity is the importance accorded to research experience. Research experience assumes far more importance in admission to doctoral-level departments than in master's departments. Thus, research experience is especially valuable if you intend to apply to a doctoral program.

### GREs and GPAs

***What sort of GRE scores and GPAs do graduate schools expect?*** As we have just seen, the two most heavily weighted numerical variables in the graduate admissions process are the applicant's GRE scores and GPA. (Only 3% of doctoral departments and 9% of master's departments required Miller Analogies Test scores, so we devote no additional attention to them).

**Table 3** presents the minimum required and actual GRE scores and GPAs of incoming graduate students in psychology, separately for master's-only and doctoral departments. Note the two different standards here: the minimum required to even be considered for admission, and the scores of the incoming students. The minimum scores are always lower than the actual scores of incoming students.

The *minimum* required Verbal plus Quantitative score averages 1066 for doctoral departments and 952 for master's departments. The *actual* Verbal plus Quantitative scores of incoming graduate students average 1183 for doctoral departments and 1055 for master's departments. (The Analytical Writing Test is still too new to collect data on it.) The GRE psychology subject test scores average 633 for incoming doctoral students and 577 for incoming master's students.

Inspection of this table reveals a number of important differences between master's and doctoral departments. Doctoral departments require higher minimum GRE scores and secure higher actual GRE scores among their incoming students than master's departments. For minimum scores on the GRE subtests, the average difference is on the order of 80 points; for actual scores on the GRE subtests, the average difference is approximately 70-75 points, again favoring the doctoral departments. Similar trends are evident on the GRE psychology subject test, with a difference of 56-57 points.

Of course, graduate departments also regularly require grade point averages in making admissions decisions. Most departments rely on the overall (or cumulative) undergraduate GPAs, and fewer departments require psychology GPAs and last-two-years GPAs.

**Table 3** also displays minimum required and actual grade point averages for first-year graduate students in psychology. The mean overall GPAs required for admission consideration hover around 3.11 for doctoral departments and 2.92 for master's departments. The mean overall GPAs of incoming students are 3.54 for doctoral departments and 3.37 for master's departments.

These numbers translate into useful benchmarks when selecting graduate programs in which to apply. Master's programs will expect, at an absolute minimum, 950-1000 on combined GREs and a 2.9 or 3.0 cumulative undergraduate GPA. Doctoral programs will expect at least a 1050 GRE score and a 3.0 or 3.1 GPA. The actual scores of incoming students are much higher, of course: a combined mean GRE score of 1050 and a 3.4 mean GPA for master's students and a combined mean GRE of 1,200 and a 3.5 or 3.6 mean GPA for doctoral students. Keep these general benchmarks in mind as you compile a list of potential graduate programs.

## Stay Tuned

Part II of this article will feature information about acceptance rates, retention figures, tuition costs, and financial assistance. Stay tuned for more data-driven assistance in successfully navigating the anxiety-provoking graduate admissions process in psychology.

**Table 1**  
Characteristics of Students Enrolled in  
Master's-Only and Doctoral Departments in Psychology

Characteristics	Master's-Only Departments <i>N</i> = 186			Doctoral Departments <i>N</i> = 414		
	<i>M</i>	( <i>SD</i> )	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>M</i>	( <i>SD</i> )	<i>Mdn</i>
Full-time students	39.4	(36.4)	28	103.9	(107.0)	77
Part-time students	33.0	(49.3)	18	39.6	(55.3)	18
% of first-year students who are racial/ethnic minority	21.4	(22.3)	16	27.3	(20.1)	23

**Table 2**  
Importance of Various Criteria in Admissions Decisions by Level of Department

Criteria	Master's			Doctoral		
	<i>M</i>	( <i>SD</i> )	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	( <i>SD</i> )	<i>N</i>
Letters of recommendation	2.74	(.49)	179	2.82	(.42)	410
Personal statement/ goals & objectives	2.63	(.55)	171	2.81	(.41)	410
GPA	2.75	(.43)	179	2.74	(.45)	402
Interview	2.30	(.76)	106	2.62	(.60)	345
Research experience	2.04	(.74)	165	2.54	(.65)	405
GRE/MAT scores	2.36	(.66)	152	2.50	(.55)	364
Clinically related public service	1.94	(.70)	154	1.91	(.69)	365
Work experience	1.91	(.65)	166	1.87	(.68)	396
Extracurricular activity	1.46	(.54)	147	1.41	(.55)	357

Means are calculated on a coding scheme where 3 = high, 2 = medium, and 1 = low importance.

**Table 3**  
Minimum Required and Actual Scores of  
First-Year Graduate Students by Level of Department

Measure	Minimum Required			Actual Scores		
	<i>M</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>N</i>
<b>Doctoral departments</b>						
Graduate Record Examination						
Verbal	529	528	76	571	571	233
Quantitative	538	550	76	626	630	233
Verbal + Quantitative	1066	1050	103	1183	1200	172
Psychology subject test	552	559	30	633	638	93
Grade point average						
Overall	3.11	3.00	200	3.54	3.56	232
Psychology	3.17	3.00	69	3.66	3.70	65
Last two years	3.16	3.00	78	3.67	3.70	89
<b>Master's departments</b>						
Graduate Record Examination						
Verbal	449	450	53	504	500	72
Quantitative	453	450	50	549	540	70
Verbal + Quantitative	952	1000	57	1055	1050	57
Psychology subject test	495	500	12	577	570	24
Grade point average						
Overall	2.92	3.00	129	3.37	3.40	99
Psychology	3.05	3.00	58	3.48	3.50	54
Last two years	3.03	3.00	50	3.44	3.50	37

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## Graduate Admissions in Psychology: II. Acceptance Rates and Financial Considerations

by [John C. Norcross](#), Jessica L. Kohout, and Marlene Wicherski - University of Scranton (Norcross); American Psychological Association (Kohout); Cambridge, MA (Wicherski)

*This article, the second in a series, summarizes the findings of the 2005 edition of Graduate Study in Psychology (601 departments, 1,970 graduate programs) on acceptance rates, enrollment rates, retention figures, tuition costs, and financial assistance. The results are presented separately for master's programs and doctoral programs. Our aim is to translate the numerical information into practical advice for prospective graduate students and their advisors.*

In our [first article](#) of this series, we chronicled the popularity of graduate education in psychology and reviewed the methodology of our study (Norcross, Kohout, & Wicherski, 2005). We noted that approximately 27% of undergraduate psychology majors enroll in further education (Tsapogas, 2004) and that more than 40,000 full-time students are enrolled in graduate study in psychology. Our data were drawn from the 2005 edition of the *Graduate Study in Psychology* (American Psychological Association [APA], 2005), which reports information from the 2003-2004 academic year. Data were collected electronically for both entire departments and individual graduate programs on a structured questionnaire. The study included questionnaires from a total of 495 institutions, 601 separate departments, and 1,970 individual graduate programs in the United States and Canada.

This article, in turn, summarizes our results on acceptance rates, enrollment rates, retention figures, financial assistance, and tuition costs in graduate study in psychology. Our aim is to translate this mass of information into advice for students and faculty. We begin each section with a question that students typically ask about graduate admissions.

### Acceptance Rates

***What are my chances of being accepted into graduate school?*** An anxiety-provoking consideration for applicants and a controversial topic for faculty members is *acceptance rates* for graduate programs in psychology. We computed acceptance rates by dividing the number of students accepted to a program by the number of applications. Acceptance rates thus refer to the percentage of applicants accepted for admission into a single graduate program, *not* the percentage of the entire applicant pool to all programs accepted for admission in a given year. The APA-accredited PhD program in clinical psychology at University X, for example, may accept only 15 of 150 applicants (10%), but many of the applicants not accepted to University X will be admitted elsewhere. Although only 10% of the applicants to a single PhD program in clinical psychology might be accepted into that *particular* program, about half of the entire applicant pool will probably be accepted into *some* clinical PhD program.

[Table 1](#) presents the acceptance rates by subfields for doctoral programs, and [Table 2](#) presents the acceptance rates for master's programs. The mean acceptance rates to doctoral psychology programs range from a low of 19% (personality psychology, social psychology) to a high of 50% (educational psychology). The overall mean is 27.4%; that is, more than a quarter of applicants to any doctoral program are typically admitted into that program.

The overall acceptance rate to clinical psychology doctoral programs is 21%. This number includes admission to both PhD and PsyD programs and to both APA-accredited and non-APA-accredited programs.

The 21% acceptance rate masks substantial differences across the various types of clinical doctoral programs. APA-accredited PhD programs accept, on average, only 10% of applicants whereas non-APA accredited PhD programs accept 20% of applicants. APA-accredited PsyD programs accept, on average, 40% of applicants, whereas non-APA-accredited PsyD programs accept 60%. The pattern is clear: clinical PhD programs are more selective than clinical PsyD programs as a rule, and APA-accredited programs are more selective than non-APA accredited programs. The average acceptance rates range from 10% to 60%. Thus, in clinical psychology, one has to be careful about generalizing about acceptance rates and specific in identifying the type of program (PhD, PsyD, APA-accredited, non-APA-accredited, and so on).

The mean acceptance rates to master's psychology programs range from a low of 32% (neuroscience) to a high of 73% (quantitative). The average acceptance rates for master's programs are 25% to 35% higher than for doctoral programs in the same subfield. The overall mean acceptance rate is 57.4%; that is, more than half of applicants to any master's program are typically admitted into that program.

### Enrollment Rates

***How many people applying to a program actually wind up there?*** We defined enrollment rates as the number of students who enrolled in a program divided by the number of applications (*not* the number of acceptances). Tables 1 and 2 also present the enrollment rates and numbers of doctoral and master's programs by psychology subfield. The enrollment rates average 18.8 for doctoral programs and 41.9 for master's programs. In other words, about 20% of those applying to a doctoral program and 40% of those applying to a master's program will wind up attending that program.

The number of students newly enrolled in 2003-04 in responding psychology doctoral programs was 7,247 and in responding master's programs 9,925, for a total of 17,172 students. Clinical and counseling psychology programs account for approximately 47% of these students. Assuming that the 21% of nonresponding graduate psychology programs enroll slightly fewer new students than responding programs, that translates into approximately 20,750 new graduate students in psychology.

In 2003-04, the number of all full-time students enrolled in responding doctoral programs was 26,739 and the number of all full-time students enrolled in responding master's programs was 11,831 (total = 38,570). Assuming again that nonresponding programs were slightly smaller in size and enrollment than responding graduate programs, we estimate a total of 44,000 full-time graduate students in psychology.

### Retention Figures

***How many students remain and finish their graduate program?*** We calculated the annual attrition rate for full-time graduate students in psychology as the percentage of students withdrawn or dismissed divided by the total number of full-time students enrolled in a single year. The retention rate is 97.5% (attrition rate = 2.5%) for doctoral departments; 674 of 26,739 full-time students withdrew or were dismissed. The corresponding retention rate is 94.8% (attrition rate = 5.2%) for master's departments; 615 of 11,831 full-time students withdrew or were dismissed.

These numbers represent annual retention rates for all full-time graduate students, whereas previous editions of *Graduate Study in Psychology* assessed the retention rates for first-year students. In those earlier editions, over 90% of first-year doctoral students continued in their programs and 81-88% of first-year master's students continued in their programs (Norcross, Hanych, & Terranova, 1996; Stoup & Benjamin, 1982). Extrapolating across the years, retention rates are consistently high for full-time psychology graduate students.

### Tuition Costs

***How much is tuition in graduate programs?*** [Table 3](#) displays the 2003-04 tuition costs by type of graduate department. Tuition costs for doctoral departments are generally 30% to 40% higher than those in master's departments. Annual tuition for state residents averages almost \$10,000 in doctoral departments and almost \$5,000 in master's departments. As expected, tuition for nonstate residents is substantially higher, averaging \$14,691 and \$9,114, respectively, in doctoral and master's departments.

### Financial Assistance

***If I receive an assistantship in graduate school, how much will it pay?*** On average, 57% of full-time doctoral students in psychology receive some financial assistance from their programs. The numbers are lower for full-time master's students; only about 25% receive any financial support from the program itself (Gehlman, Wicherski, & Kohout, 1995; Norcross, Castle, Sayette, & Mayne, 2004).

Median and mean stipends for assistantships are about \$10,000 in doctoral departments and \$5,000 - \$5,500 in master's departments for an expected work week of 15-16 hours.



Assistantship stipends for doctoral departments are 40 to 50% higher than for master's departments despite similar numbers of hours worked per week. Fellowships/scholarships offered comparable stipends for doctoral students but, on average, require seven fewer hours of work per week than assistantships. Dollar differences between assistantships provided to first-year students and those provided to advanced students are practically nonexistent (for this reason, we do not provide data on stipends for advanced students in the table).

### In Conclusion

Applying to graduate school is frequently filled with anxieties and myths. By preparing early and informing yourself of the facts, you will be better positioned to make informed decisions on your financial and vocational future (Mayne, Norcross, & Sayette, 2006). Use these two articles and other resources to understand the facts of graduate admissions in psychology. Be informed by the evidence on, for example, application methods and fees, application deadlines, admission criteria, and typical GRE and GPA requirements. Understand the difference in acceptance rates between master's and doctoral, APA-accredited and non-APA-accredited, PhD and PsyD programs. Be forewarned about the paucity of full financial support (and the probability of debt) in most master's and PsyD programs. Be an informed, intelligent consumer who understands the odds and capitalizes on that knowledge!

**Table 1.**  
2003-04 Acceptance and Enrollment Rates for Doctoral Programs by Subfield

Subfield	Nof programs	Acceptance rate				Enrollment rate				Total Students Enrolled
		M	Mdn	Q1	Q3	M	Mdn	Q1	Q3	Sum
Clinical	211	21.2	11.1	6.2	32.4	14.3	7.4	4.1	20.9	3,324
Clinical neuropsychology	20	25.8	22.4	13.3	40.5	17.2	14.6	8.6	23.1	213
Community	12	31.0	26.4	18.7	47.6	21.2	14.3	8.6	30.2	43
Counseling	64	21.5	17.0	9.3	25.2	15.4	10.2	7.1	19.3	447
Health	12	30.9	21.5	6.1	48.8	21.4	15.0	5.5	39.3	87
School	52	37.4	31.2	18.3	47.8	27.8	18.5	13.4	33.3	392
Other health service provider subfields	49	25.7	21.9	7.7	38.8	19.4	14.3	6.6	27.6	477
Cognitive	88	32.4	26.1	14.4	43.4	22.0	14.3	7.8	29.4	351
Developmental	99	27.2	20.7	12.5	34.8	19.0	14.0	8.5	21.7	374
Educational	31	50.0	50.0	33.3	70.0	34.0	30.0	16.7	48.3	170
Environmental	2	39.1	39.1	11.5	66.7	29.1	24.8			10
Experimental	31	37.6	30.0	16.7	50.0	26.7	18.2	11.8	30.0	163
Industrial/organizational	53	25.7	17.4	12.1	31.6	16.3	11.0	5.9	16.7	281
Neuroscience	49	26.9	25.0	13.9	32.5	19.7	16.0	8.3	25.0	148
Personality	15	19.2	12.5	7.1	19.5	9.0	8.7	3.8	11.4	45
Physiological	4	39.4	33.9	11.9	72.5	27.0	20.0	8.5	52.5	12
Psychobiology	13	25.0	25.0	11.2	35.2	13.7	8.3	7.0	17.6	34
Quantitative	14	42.6	36.0	21.1	64.6	27.0	20.0	6.7	51.9	32
Social	80	19.4	15.0	9.4	27.1	11.3	8.0	5.3	15.0	270
Other research subfields	76	33.2	27.3	16.7	50.0	24.2	20.0	11.3	33.1	339
Other fields	8	22.9	22.5	9.6	36.6	14.7	13.6	4.7	20.0	36
<b>Total</b>	<b>981</b>	<b>27.4</b>	<b>20.8</b>	<b>10.6</b>	<b>38.9</b>	<b>18.8</b>	<b>13.0</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>25.0</b>	<b>7,247</b>

Note: Acceptance rates are computed by dividing the number of students accepted to a program by the number of applications. Enrollment rates are the number of students who enrolled in a program divided by the number of applications. Source: 2005 Graduate Study in Psychology.

**Table 2.**  
2003-04 Acceptance and Enrollment Rates for Master's Programs by Subfield

Subfield	Nof programs	Acceptance rate				Enrollment rate				Total Students Enrolled
		<i>M</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	Q1	Q3	<i>M</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	Q1	Q3	Sum
Clinical	98	52.7	49.5	33.9	72.3	35.5	32.0	22.3	47.7	1,671
Community	22	53.8	55.8	22.6	81.4	41.8	41.4	20.0	60.6	416
Counseling	108	65.5	67.3	50.0	84.6	51.8	50.0	33.0	66.4	2,764
Health	3	70.3	72.7	38.2		56.2	36.4	32.4		23
School	49	48.9	47.8	28.3	72.5	39.7	34.3	19.3	56.1	682
Other health service provider subfields	64	64.5	69.5	43.1	83.2	49.2	40.0	30.8	66.3	1,395
Cognitive	10	52.8	45.8	31.8	77.7	27.3	31.7	11.3	40.0	25
Developmental	19	47.9	50.0	31.2	66.7	33.0	33.3	17.9	48.1	166
Educational	15	57.3	56.5	46.2	70.6	41.6	38.1	30.0	54.2	149
Experimental	38	55.4	50.8	40.0	71.9	38.0	34.5	19.8	50.0	261
Industrial/organizational	76	56.6	60.0	32.5	75.5	38.6	35.0	19.4	50.0	849
General	59	58.0	53.8	40.0	75.0	41.3	33.8	23.4	59.4	972
Neuroscience	6	32.3	35.9	8.8	52.6	25.8	25.3	9.1	38.6	50
Quantitative	5	72.7	83.3	47.2	92.9	63.5	61.9	47.6	81.0	18
Social	8	47.6	47.5	26.2	65.0	27.5	28.6	22.2	30.0	29
Other research subfields	41	60.7	60.9	42.9	78.8	43.1	39.4	32.3	58.2	443
Other fields	2	33.3	33.3			33.3	33.3			12
Total	624	57.4	57.9	38.8	76.5	41.9	37.5	25.0	55.0	9,925

Note: Acceptance rates are computed by dividing the number of students accepted to a program by the number of applications. Enrollment rates are the number of students who enrolled in a program divided by the number of applications. Source: 2005 Graduate Study in Psychology.

**Table 3.**  
2003-04 Tuition Costs and Financial Assistance by Type of Department

	Doctoral Departments (N=312)			Masters-only Departments (N=111)		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mdn</i>
Annual tuition						
state resident (master's)	\$7,363	\$6,284	\$5,038	\$4,803	\$4,493	\$3,216
state resident (doctoral)	\$9,770	\$8,165	\$6,335			
nonstate resident (master's)	\$12,296	\$5,691	\$11,195	\$9,114	\$5,037	\$8,346
nonstate resident (doctoral)	\$14,691	\$6,781	\$14,092			
Teaching assistantship (1st year students)						
annual stipend	\$10,195	\$3,995	\$10,617	\$5,438	\$3,295	\$5,000
hours worked per week	16.7	5.0	20.0	14.7	5.2	15.0
Research Assistantship (1st year students)						
annual stipend	\$9,424	\$4,738	\$10,065	\$5,351	\$3,242	\$5,000
hours worked per week	16.1	5.4	20.0	14.6	5.4	15.0
Traineeship (1st year students)						
annual stipend	\$13,889	\$5,237	\$13,648	\$6,300	\$2,162	\$6,000
hours worked per week	12.7	8.8	20.0	13.6	7.9	16.0
Fellowship/scholarship (1st year students)						
annual stipend	\$10,127	\$6,365	\$11,500	\$3,204	\$3,243	\$2,000
hours worked per week	7.4	8.8	0	7.2	8.8	0

Source: 2005 Graduate Study in Psychology.

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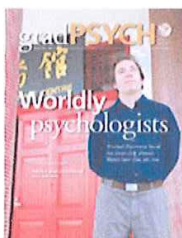
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## Settle your score

### Don't let a poor GRE score undermine your academic career.

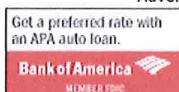
In 2001 the registrar's office at an Ivy League school accidentally leaked graduate students' GRE scores via a mass e-mail. Among the students whose scores were broadcast to the psychology department was a woman who had transferred into the program from a state school and had a combined, mediocre score of around 1,000.



She was also the psychology department superstar and the best student to come out of that program in five years, recalls a former classmate.

That woman's story is just one example of how GRE scores don't always predict a student's success. But low GRE scores are more than just an inadequate way to gauge a student's future success: They can undermine students' confidence and keep them from applying to grad schools that might offer a dream fit.

#### Advertisements



"It felt like a slap in the face that admissions might not look at my application because of my GREs when everything else indicates I would be a great candidate," says Patty Zorbas, a clinical psychology graduate student at George Mason University.

Now in her second year at GMU, Zorbas has a 4.0 and won the department's Outstanding First-Year Student Award.

Studies on the GRE's effectiveness in predicting graduate school success are also mixed. A meta-analysis of studies on the GRE's predictive validity published in 2001 in *Psychological Bulletin* (Vol. 127, No. 1) shows that the GRE is a valid predictor of graduate school GPA, first-year grade point average, comprehensive examination scores and research productivity.

Meanwhile, a 1997 study of Yale students by Robert J. Sternberg, PhD, and Wendy Williams, PhD, published in *American Psychologist* (Vol. 52, No. 6) found that GRE predicted first-year grades, but not other kinds of performance, including students' creative, practical, research and teaching abilities. But such studies only measure achievement of students who made it into graduate programs, Zorbas and others point out. "They don't know how the other students would do," she says.

High GRE scores wow peers and many top programs, but low scores don't have to tarnish your application, faculty and students say. Here are ways to maximize your admissions



chances with a less-than-stellar score:

- Retake the test. Rosalie Hall, PhD, who handles admissions for the industrial-organizational psychology program at the University of Akron, says it's common to see applications from students who have taken the exam two or three times, and she uses the highest scores. David Pizarro, PhD, who oversees admissions for the social and personality program at Cornell University, says test-taking frequency doesn't affect how your score is viewed—it's the best scores that matter. "We are pretty indifferent to how many times they take it."

- Play up your strengths. Low GRE scores don't always trump other qualities, such as outstanding research experience and genuine, personal letters of recommendation about a student's academic promise. "Someone who has done a year of research in a lab with a respected scientist with a strong letter of recommendation can go a long way," says Pizarro.

Crafting a well-written letter and highlighting writing experience can boost a poor verbal score, and spotlighting research experiences or creative internships can draw attention away from poor scores. "I worked hard to beef up everything else around them," says Kathryn Scheffel, a graduate student in the University of Virginia clinical and school psychology program.

- Get strong letters of recommendation. Letting your writers know you did so-so on the GRE gives them an opportunity to otherwise highlight your academic promise. "It really helps if you've gotten a lot of face time with a professor," says Pizarro. "The personal touches really count. We want to know if someone is going to be a pleasure in the department and socially adept."

- Realize that GRE isn't everything for all programs. Stanford University, the University of Connecticut and the University of Florida are among many graduate departments that say they don't weed out applications based on GRE scores. In fact, Greg Neimeyer, PhD, the former graduate coordinator at the University of Florida psychology department, says he thinks that practice is generally on its way out. "Programs are looking for ways to enhance the diversity of their graduate admissions, and this necessitates looking closely at qualitative indicators, rather than objective or quantitative measures alone," he says.

- Keeping the faith. Scheffel got mixed advice about downplaying her low GRE scores when she was applying. Some faculty told her to explain her low GRE scores and others said ignore them. She chose to let her application speak for itself and marveled when she started getting invitations for interviews. "It's presented to students that the GREs are everything," says Scheffel. "They never even came up."

**By Jamie Chamberlin**  
*gradPSYCH* Staff

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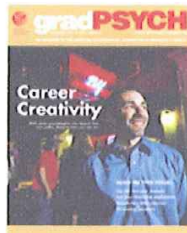
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## First-year hurdles

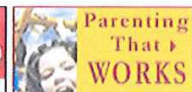
### Make the most of your initial year in graduate school

In the first days of grad school, a lot of students have the feeling that they somehow fooled their school into admitting them and they're never going to match their peers. Psychologist Julie Quimby, PhD, calls it the "imposter syndrome."



"It's really common among high-achieving people: lots of self-doubt, fear with the first challenging experience that they're the only one having trouble, and a genuine sense that they don't belong," says Quimby, who teaches counseling psychology at Towson University in Maryland.

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Indeed, first-year students can be overwhelmed with how much they have to learn, says University of Wisconsin–Madison cognitive psychology professor Art Glenberg, PhD.

"They worry whether they're going to measure up to the other students who are very, very bright--especially the advanced students who seem to know so much more," Glenberg says. "You have to keep in mind that you were specifically selected for your intelligence and your skill and with the expectation that you're not going to be at that advanced level right away, but you'll get there."

But just how do students navigate that first year of "getting there?" Professors and advanced students advise first-year students to learn to manage coursework, make the most of adviser and peer relationships, get started on research and take care of themselves.

"I tell my students to not look at grad school as a hurdle to overcome, but an end in itself," Quimby says. "If students are invested in learning and make a point of getting involved in the program, they begin to naturally take on the appropriate professional identity."

#### Handing coursework

- Use a divide and conquer approach. The amount of work can be daunting, but it becomes less so when you take it step by step, says counseling psychologist Lewis Schlosser, PhD, who teaches counseling at Seton Hall University in New Jersey. He suggests finding students in your cohort whose academic ability you trust, dividing up some of the readings and taking turns teaching each other the ins and outs of a topic or a new skill.



"People have different personalities and strengths, and if you figure those out and work with them, you can help each other immensely," says Schlosser, who finished his doctorate in 2003.

- Remember there's more than coursework. Once students hit the graduate level, priorities shift, Glenberg says, particularly for students in research disciplines who are launching themselves into academic careers. "Some students come in with the undergraduate idea that the most important thing is classwork and grades, but the most important thing is getting integrated into your major professor's program and establishing a line of research for yourself," he says.

And for students in counseling and clinical disciplines, the focus should be on the skills you are learning, says Schlosser.

"Students shouldn't be getting all Bs, but for the most part, grades do not matter: It is not going to say 'just barely' on your diploma," he adds. "You're developing a skill set you didn't have before, so there's much more to it than grades."

- Be open to new ideas. First-year classes will ask you to look at your own biases and open your mind about other cultures, says fourth-year clinical psychology student Ken Liberatore at Alliant International University, Los Angeles.

"I entered grad school very much unaware of some flagrant biases I carried as a member of the dominant culture," Liberatore says. A yearlong multicultural course helped knock some of these biases down and increased his cultural sensitivity, he says.

Also be open to new thoughts on what you want to research, Schlosser says. "You will pick up a lot of information along the way," he says. "It may refocus your research interests for you, or it may send you in a totally different direction."

#### Connecting with your adviser

- Read up. Before you get to work with your adviser, make sure you know his or her body of research, Glenberg says. For example, go the library and read a large selection of your adviser's published papers or talk with an upperclassman about your professor's work. It'll get the ball rolling early for collaboration.

- Develop a relationship. Your goal should be to cultivate a meaningful professional and personal relationship with your adviser, so make sure to spend time with him or her--be it on a research team or just chatting at department functions, Schlosser says. Ideally, not only will you be very engaged with your adviser's research, but the adviser will take a personal interest in your professional development.

- Understand an adviser change is possible. Students who want to change their advisers often feel that they're about to commit political suicide, Schlosser says, but changing advisers is common in most psychology programs. Switching makes particular sense when your research or practice interests change and working with a different professor would better suit your new interests. Being aware of your department's politics by querying more advanced students can help you navigate a change without alienating anyone, Schlosser says. For more on advisers and mentors, see the [January issue of \*gradPSYCH\*](#).

#### Getting started with research

- Invest the time necessary. Glenberg says doing major research in psychology is more than a full-time commitment. "To be successful in a research institution in a psychology program, you've got to be putting in 60 or 70 hours a week," he says. "You have to make sure that you love your topic because then those hours are a joy."

Second-year personality psychology student Jennifer Sweeton of Stanford University in California has encountered the more-than-full-time commitment Glenberg describes.

"Now I realize success isn't as easy as coming up with good ideas," Sweeton says. "It requires pushing through the mundane tasks, staying up late redoing that Excel spreadsheet you made an entry mistake on, running subjects even when you know that you'll end up not being able to use their data and writing and rewriting that proposal that has been covered in red lines by your adviser."

- Make it approachable. For students in counseling and clinical disciplines, getting involved with research may feel daunting, says Schlosser. So, keep it manageable: Take on small responsibilities within a research team to get a feel for the work and, later, consider getting more involved.
- Look inward for research ideas. Consider a research topic that you personally care about, Schlosser says. "It gives you a passion for the topic, which will keep you going during the more difficult times in the research process," he says. "And what happens developmentally is eventually the topic becomes interesting in its own right, not just because you had a personal experience with it." That said, don't pick something that hits so close to home you'll be uncomfortable thinking about it everyday, he adds.
- Avoid tunnel vision. Choosing one research topic and planning to stick with it through your dissertation may be an attractive idea, but, at least in the beginning, you are better off looking at a broad range of topics, says third-year cognitive psychology student David Havas of the University of Wisconsin–Madison. "It's more important to gain a breadth of research experience than it is to design your career," he says. "Consider your first-year research as a time for developing your identity, not as a topic, but as a scientist."

#### Taking care of yourself

- Develop a strong network of friends. Find people both within your program and in the community to spend time with, says second-year counseling psychology student Christine Williams of the University of Akron. "We try to adopt as many nonpsychologists as we can to balance the shop talk," Williams says of her pals. For more on self-care, see the [March 2005 issue of gradPSYCH](#).
- Consider therapy. Therapy can help you understand yourself better and manage the stress of the first year, Schlosser says. "It's amazing that counseling and clinical students can be really reluctant to see a therapist," he says. "But that's a mistake. Therapy can be a really beneficial source of support."
- Get away. Because there are fewer classes in grad school than in an undergraduate program, there's more flexibility in your schedule, Sweeton says. Use that time to make room for activities that will provide you with an enjoyable outlet for stress. "For me that's sitting on a beach for a week," Schlosser says. Sweeton takes a gymnastics class.

"For others maybe it's getting to yoga once a week. Going to the gym. Sitting down to eat," Schlosser adds. "Life doesn't stop because you're in grad school."

—BRIDGET MURRAY LAW  
gradPSYCH Staff

#### Also in CAREER center ...

- > [The half-time option](#)
- > [Postgrad growth area: Geropsychology](#)

## V. Helpful Resources

### Graduate/Professional School Process – From the UMKC Career Services Center

#### Evaluate Your Options – 18 to 24 Months Prior to Application Deadlines

- **Contact the schools** you are interested in to request catalog, application and financial aid information.
- **Review and research relevant graduate school Web sites** such as: [www.petersons.com](http://www.petersons.com), [www.graduateguide.com](http://www.graduateguide.com), and [www.usnews.com](http://www.usnews.com)
- **Talk with faculty, advisors, family and friends** for recommendations, suggestions and support.
- **Assess your interests, values, abilities and motivation** for attending graduate/professional school.

#### Narrow Your Choices – 12 to 18 Months Prior to Application Deadline

- **Read the schools' materials** to learn about class sizes, specialties, requirements, and faculty research areas.
- Review your qualifications and the schools' admission criteria. Will you meet, exceed or fall below their admission guidelines? If you have any concerns, the graduate school will give you a good indication of how competitive your test scores and GPA will be with the other applicants.
- **Consider personal and professional fit rather than rankings to select your top choices.** A number one ranked program may not always be the best fit.
- **Narrow your choices of schools and programs to approximately 3 to 10.** Apply early in your senior year.
- **Visit your top two or three selections.** Speaking with faculty and students gives you an accurate picture of the program and if you would thrive in that academic environment. If it is not possible to visit, ask if you may schedule a phone appointment to speak with faculty and current students in the program via the telephone.

#### Applying to Schools – 6 to 12 Months Prior to Application Deadline

##### Prepare for the Appropriate Test

- **Free materials are available** for most graduate/professional admissions tests if you register early.
- Visit the admission tests' Web sites for more information on how to register, prepare and take the test.

#### Strengthen Your Application

- Graduate/Professional Schools look at more than your entrance exam scores and GPA.
- Involvement in undergraduate research, internships, co-ops, a study abroad program, student organizations, and leadership positions are all value-added experiences that with strengthen your candidacy.
- Select references who can speak of your abilities and accomplishments.
- **Your personal essay must be perfect.** Ask faculty, friends and career services to proofread it before sending.
- Send in all materials two to three weeks in advance of the deadline.



**Make Your Decision** - 2 to 3 Months After Application Deadline

If you have been accepted to more than one program...

- Re-evaluate the programs and review your career goals. How does each program fit?
- Discuss career goals with the faculty of the graduate programs to see if their curriculum fits your needs; they will be honest with you.
- Compare the number of applicants to the number of acceptances. This can tell you the competitiveness and popularity of the program. Also, you may use this information to gauge if your cohort will be large or small.

If you have not been accepted to a program...

- **Do not give up hope.** There are many reasons for why a student may not be accepted into a graduate/professional school. Learn from the experience to make your second application process a success.
- Ask an admission counselor or faculty member at the graduate school(s) why you were not selected and what you can do to strengthen your application.
- If your GPA and/or test scores kept you from being accepted. You may consider retaking your admission test and/or taking additional undergraduate courses to raise your GPA or fulfill missing entrance requirements.
- Apply to a larger number of schools to improve your chances of admission.
- Step out of school for a year or two. Get a job in the area you wish to pursue or participate in a year-of-service program. The real-life experience will help you the next time you apply for graduate school.

**Information retrieved from:**

Retrieved on the internet from: [http://www.career.umkc.edu/?p=students\\_graduate](http://www.career.umkc.edu/?p=students_graduate) Sept. 13, 2010

## Websites and Books

Websites for your personal statement and vita:

<http://www.psywww.com/careers/perstmt.htm>

<http://www.socialpsychology.org/vitatips.htm>

<http://wpersonalstatementww.accepted.com/grad/.aspx>

<http://www.rider.edu/suler/gradschl.html>

[http://www.quintcareers.com/curriculum\\_vitae.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/curriculum_vitae.html)

[http://gradschool.about.com/od/curriculumvita/Writing\\_Your\\_Curriculum\\_Vitae.htm](http://gradschool.about.com/od/curriculumvita/Writing_Your_Curriculum_Vitae.htm)

Graduate school timelines, areas of specialization within graduate programs, and other useful things to know before applying:

<http://apa.org/education/grad/faqs.aspx>

<http://www.psywww.com/careers/time-grd.htm>

<http://www.psywww.com/careers/specialt.htm>

<http://www.rider.edu/suler/gradschl.html>

<http://www.psychology.ilstu.edu/undergrad/gradschool/index.html>

[http://www.quintcareers.com/graduate\\_school\\_criteria.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/graduate_school_criteria.html)

Websites for GRE information:

[www.ets.org/gre](http://www.ets.org/gre)

<http://www.psywww.com/careers/gre.htm>

<http://www.testinfo.net/gre/gre-tips.htm>

<http://gradschool.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.syvum.com%2Fgre%2Ftips.html>

Books about graduate school:

*Getting In: A Step-by Step Plan for Gaining Admission to Graduate School in Psychology*

*Graduate Programs in Psychology*

*The Complete Guide to Graduate School Admission: Psychology and Related Fields.*

*Graduate Study in Psychology and Allied Fields*