How to Get into Graduate School

Networking

- yes, you should meet as many pros as possible as early as possible
- join psych club, Psi Chi when eligible (go to meetings)

Research

- The importance of research experience depends upon the school you are applying to. If you are applying to a non-research based program (M.S.W., Psy.D.), look to see what their requirements are.
- either do an honors thesis (if your GPA > 3.3) or work in a lab here
- Apply for a UROP grant to fund your honors thesis (at CU)
- Apply for a SURF grant (CU)
- Apply for a Psi Chi research grant (psichi.org)
- present your honors thesis at Undergraduate Research Day or a conference
- try to get your honors thesis published

Organizations

- join psych club, Psi Chi, other honors associations
- become a leader in one or more
- become a student affiliate of RMPA or APA or divisions within APA

Volunteer/Job experience (esp. with clinical interests)

- shows initiative
- gets you experience instead of just saying you want to “help people”
- get a summer job that is relevant to psych
- start writing your curriculum vita now (expanded resume)

Course selection/GPA/academic interest

- choose hard classes
- It is important that you take classes beyond the minimum requirements of your college. Additional classes in Research Methods and Statistics will not only make you more marketable to graduate programs, it will prepare you for the work ahead.
- Know the requirements of the schools you are applying to and take the courses they recommend
- Go to psych club and department-sponsored presentations
- Attend Undergraduate Research Day and a conference or two
- Internship?

GRE

- **General test** – computer test only (now made up of verbal, quant, and essay)
  - if take it twice, some schools take the average, so take it seriously
  - practice on the computer
  - get a book to help you learn
  - Writing assessment – critical reasoning skills and analytical writing/ computer or paper
    - 45 minute task: Present your perspective on an issue – 2 choices
    - 30 minute task: Analyze an argument – no choice of topics
PSYCH GRE test
• only take it if you need to (for the programs you are interested in)
• Subject tests test your content knowledge in a particular subject – only given 3 times a year / paper based, so takes 4-6 weeks to be mailed - plan ahead

Selecting Programs
• go to www.apa.org/students for exploration advice
• EXAMINE YOUR REASONS
• Consider housing costs, family obligations, length of commitment, future employment outlook
• Rather than thinking about the reputation of the university, it’s more relevant to find out about the reputation of that department (e.g., US News and World Report rankings)
• Search the psychological literature (e.g., PsychInfo) for journal articles pertaining to the area in which you are most interested. Note the names of the authors who are publishing in this area and the names of the universities with which they are affiliated.
• Determine whether these universities offer the type of graduate degree that interests you.
• If a professor is doing what you would like to do and there is an appropriate graduate program at that university, send that person a brief e-mail expressing your interests and asking whether they are accepting students next year (or whenever).
• ask students who are already there if it is competitive, what it is like.
• Ask professors or professionals in that field for advice on programs.
• visit schools if possible, request meeting with pros and/or grad students.
• Accredited program is desirable for clinical/counseling degrees.
• Talk with grad students here.

Fin Aid –
• what do they offer, to what percent of students?
• Don’t hesitate to ask hard questions about funding
• Teaching and research assistantships are an important part of the educational experience
• Read the fine print about how funding is allocated

Getting Organized
• college search – Graduate Study in Psychology lists programs by state, and type
• for clinical: Insider’s Guide to Graduate Programs in Clinical Psychology
• get application materials
• contact pros at those institutions if you want to work with one in particular
Letters of recommendation
- use credentials office or give stamped, already addressed envelopes
- give 6 weeks notice at least
- have materials ready (vita, type of program you are applying to, relevant experience, classes and grades and dates you took from that prof, GPAs, conferences attended, anything extra, credentials form)
- A confidential letter usually has more validity in the eyes of the admission committee (You can pre-screen the quality of your letter by asking, “Would you feel comfortable writing a strong letter of recommendation for me?”)

- Who Do You Ask?
  - Professors are best.
  - Employers are good if the work is related to your field.
  - Supervisors of volunteer work are good if the work is related to your field.

Personal statements
- Essays that indicate applicants know what the strengths of a department are and how that department matches their goals carry a lot of clout

- Be Sure to Include:
  - All areas requested in the application.
  - Your talents and strengths--now is not the time to be modest.
  - A weakness (only if requested)--should be the shortest section of your statement and should end with a positive statement.
  - Distinguishing accomplishments (awards, presentations, officer positions, etc.).
  - Any computer skills you have.
  - Evidence of your writing skills
  - Research experience.
  - References to the particular graduate program (this will require some research).
  - Follow length guidelines in application (usually 1-2 pages single-spaced).

- Be Sure to Exclude:
  - Emphasis on your weaknesses.
  - Misspelled words, typos, incorrect grammar, etc.
  - Negative remarks about any person or program.
  - The fact that your interest in psychology stems from your own disorder.

- Before You Mail Your Application:
  - Have one of your psychology professors read it and provide feedback (preferably a professor writing a letter of recommendation for you).
  - Have one of your favorite English professors read it for style.
  - Print the statement with a quality printer.
  - Read it one last time to make sure it is correct.
  - Remember, you will be competing against people whose applications are complete, legible, and error-free
MISC:
- See last page with checklists and timeline.
- Keep a “what I’ve done, attended” file
- Goal is 6-10 schools to apply to (some hard, some easy, some maybe, MS?)
- Don’t get overwhelmed! It is much easier said than done, but is important to stay focused on your goals. Find out what program you are interested in, what you need to get into it, and start plugging away!
- Don’t hesitate to ask for advice from the Advising Office, professors, or the Psi Chi Officers. You can never get too much advice, and it is great to get opinions from multiple sources.
- Be open-minded about different types of graduate programs in psychology. Many students limit themselves early on to Clinical Psychology. While this is a popular track, it is also highly competitive. (Many programs have 10% acceptance rates). Consider programs in Industrial Organizational Psychology, Forensic Psychology, Social Psychology, or Behavioral Neuroscience (there are many programs beyond this list!). Make sure that you are passionate about the program you are about to pursue.
- **Good luck! 😊

Sources of information

http://www.apa.org/students
http://www.psichi.org/pubs/search.asp (browse articles by “graduate school”)
http://www.gre.org

References:


TIMETABLE FOR APPLYING TO GRADUATE PROGRAMS

You should begin to plan in the summer before your senior year or at least a year before you start graduate school. Study deadlines for specific programs and for the university (not always identical) since deadlines may vary significantly depending upon the institution to which you are applying.

Summer
Write a draft statement of purpose. Start browsing through guides to graduate programs and catalogs.

September
Meet with faculty members to discuss statement and possible programs. Ask for letters of recommendation. Sign up for required standardized tests.

October
Take standardized tests. Request application materials from programs.

November
Order transcripts. Ask if your records office can send a transcript with your fall grades in time to meet the deadlines of programs to which you are applying.

December
Complete application forms (do a draft on a photocopy of the form first). Give your recommenders the forms to fill out or the addresses to which they should send their letters and copies of your statement of purpose or your response to specific questions asked by the program.

December/January
Mail applications. Even if deadlines are later, it is good to get the applications in early.

February
Contact programs about the possibility of visiting. Make trips if possible.

April
If you are applying for need based financial aid programs, you may have to file a copy of your federal income tax return.

APPLICATION CHECKLIST

--- Statement of purpose
--- Letters of recommendation
--- Transcripts
--- Standardized tests
--- Applications for admission
--- Applications for financial aid
--- Applications for fellowships
--- Income Tax Return (if necessary for Financial Aid)
--- Other information requested
TABLE 1
Graduate School Admissions in Departments of Psychology by Subfields, 2001–2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialty Area</th>
<th>PhD</th>
<th>PsyD</th>
<th>MA/MS</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Number</td>
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<td>Applicants</td>
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<td>Clinical</td>
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<td>Clinical Neuropsychology</td>
<td>807</td>
<td>137</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>71</td>
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<td>Counseling</td>
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<td>704</td>
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<td>Health</td>
<td>605</td>
<td>251</td>
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<td>School</td>
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<td>295</td>
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<td>Other Health Service</td>
<td>Provider Subfields</td>
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<td>350</td>
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<td>Comparative</td>
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<td>Developmental</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>36.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Industrial/Organizational</td>
<td>959</td>
<td>207</td>
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<td>General</td>
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<td>Neuroscience</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Research Subfields</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Fields</td>
<td>1930</td>
<td>422</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>43,920</td>
<td>6963</td>
<td>15.8</td>
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Number of Departments 962 74 659

Notes: The data in this table were compiled by the American Psychological Association (APA) Research Office, based on the 2003 volume of Graduate Study in Psychology. Shaded areas indicate no Departments of Psychology offering degrees in those specialty areas in 2001–2002.

TABLE 2
Course Prerequisites for Graduate Programs (N = 1554) Requiring Specific Psychology Courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Required</th>
<th>Preferred</th>
<th>Required or preferred</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abnormal/Psychopathology</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Childhood/Developmental</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>History &amp; Systems</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lab course</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physiological/Biopsychology</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Methods/Experimental Design</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
<td>66.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sensation &amp; Perception</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
<td>85.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Testing/Measurement</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
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