

Graduate school information session

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Why go?

- 1) Getting increasingly difficult to obtain jobs with only undergraduate training
- 2) Certain jobs (professor, etc.) can only be obtained with a graduate degree
- 3) It'll give you a pretty decent air of superiority relative to your friends

Big Decision #1 – Clinical vs. Other

- Most folks attempt to go into clinical, primarily because that's all they think psychology is
- Problem: Acceptance to clinical psychology graduate programs is much more difficult than acceptance to medical school (about 6-8% acceptance for clinical, up to 30 or 40% for medical)
- Reasons to go clinical: desire to do patient work, clinical practice, money
- If your interests are more related to research, you're better off going the experimental route (behavioral neuroscience, cognitive, social, developmental, personality, etc.)
- Helpful hint: do a thesis or independent study or volunteer in a lab, gets you valuable experience, pads your application, lets you know if this is something for you

Once you've decided that...

- Next question, what is the best program for me?
- Psychology is an area that covers a lot of ground, the APA doesn't even bother ranking programs
- If you have a general idea of what area you'd like to do research in, ask a prof in your area which schools to look into (e.g. Cognition/Vision – Iowa, Illinois: Beckman Institute, Social – Yale, Neuroimaging – Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Vanderbilt, all good – any of the UC schools)

Research schools

- Start researching schools in the following way
 - 1) search online for various strong programs
 - 2) determine who is at these places who you might be interested in working with
 - 3) email profs to ask if they are accepting graduate students
 - 4) check to see if you meet minimum requirements and adjust your search accordingly

What most programs will look at in deciding whether to admit you

- 1) Transcript (marks: emphasis on last 2 years and last 10 psych courses)
- 2) GRE scores
- 3) Letters of recommendation
- 4) Personal statement
- 5) Fit of interests with department, knowledge of department
- 6) Have you contacted professors in the department, have they shown interest

GRE

- Graduate Record Examinations
- Most schools require that you write two of these
 - General GRE – tests verbal, mathematical and analytical ability
 - Subject GRE – tests knowledge of psychology
- Study tips: General – study lists of words but overall this is frightening (psychology verbal scores are usually lower than other areas), brush up on high school math, get a practice book
- Study tips: Subject – Go back over your intro psych text
- GREs can be written more than once if you are not happy with your score (though old marks will show up on transcripts) but you need to wait awhile between tests, allow for this when scheduling
- Rewritten tests show on record unless you cancel test before receiving scores

Letters of recommendation

- Always try to get letters from profs first, then post docs, then former bosses, then graduate students
- Try to assess if the writer will say good things about you (referees will be honest as it's their reputation at stake also)
- If there's something in your transcripts you're not happy about, get your referee to address it

Personal statement

- Take this seriously and try to do something to set yourself apart
- Always try to
 - A) tell a story
 - B) describe relevant training and why you want to enter graduate school
 - C) describe interests
 - D) mention folks you'd like to work with (make sure they're accepting students)

Things to look for in choosing schools

- What is the profile of students recently admitted to the program, in terms of academic background, standardized test scores, and demographic characteristics?
- What is the program's "track record" in terms of students admitted who graduate, and the average number of years required to achieve a degree?
- What are the goals and objectives of the program and do they match my interests and capabilities as a graduate student?
- For programs with an emphasis on academic and research careers, what is the record of graduates' success (during their first five years) in obtaining postdoctoral research fellowships, academic appointments, or applied research positions outside the academy?

Things to look for in choosing schools

- For programs with an emphasis on professional practice, what is the program's accreditation status (if applicable), the record of its graduates' success in obtaining licensure, and its graduates' selection for advanced practice residencies and professional development in their first five years?
- For programs that require an internship or practicum, what is the success rate of placement for students attending the program?
- What financial resources are available to students, and what is the average level of indebtedness among recent graduates of the program?
- Clinically accredited (can be good or bad depending)

Money

- The number 1 reason you want to go to a good school: most programs offer a minimum level of support which is enough to survive on, smaller schools do not offer this and you will accumulate debt
- Funding is made up of money from the department (e.g. tuition waivers) plus TA or RA positions...or you may be funded off your supervisors grant in which case you'll have to work on grant related research

Masters or Ph.D.

- Some schools allow admission directly to a Ph.D. without a Masters (mostly clinical), some only have terminal MA programs, some immediately accept you into both...determine what you think is best (e.g. if you only want a Master's don't go somewhere you're expected to do a Ph.D. too)

How long of an investment is grad school

- On average, 5-6 years (1-2 year MA plus 3-4 year PhD)
- Should be pretty sure this is something you want to pursue...remember that the school/advisor invests in you too
- Expect an additional 2-3 years of postdoctoral work too if you're going the academic route

What to look for in an advisor

- 1) Personal compatibility: always try to meet people before you make a decision, at least talk by phone. Always ask for emails/contact info for other graduate students to get their opinion on the advisor (need advice on common questions, email me: mdodd2@unl.edu)
- 2) Research interests: Very important to gauge what you'll be doing and whether you'll be restricted to specific topics
- 3) Young and motivated sometimes trumps older and experienced (ideal if you can get both)
- 4) Make sure advisory style works for you
- 5) Always contact advisors early, sometimes this will help you get around admission requirements (though don't count on this)

Where to go

- Always pick the best school that's a good fit for you
- Important...if you want to settle back in your home city/province/state, go away for graduate school
- Unwise to do undergrad, graduate, and postdoctoral work in the same place...ideal to do all three in different institutions

What to expect

- First 2-3 years: Lots of course work...time consuming but fairly easy to get good marks
- Some research project aimed at getting an MA
- Your schedule will ebb and flow considerably (enjoy the downtime and work your butt off during the tough time)
- After that: PhD...no classes, a lot of independent research projects, continually work towards getting your stuff published in good journals
- This can also vary by supervisor and their expectation, as well as area

Other questions?

- Email me: mdodd2@unl.edu
