
SO YOU WANT TO GET INTO GRAD SCHOOL, HUH?

Thoughts on a successful application



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Spring 2024

CHOOSE YOUR DEGREE

MASTERS OR PHD

- **Your degree should be driven by the following: what is your ultimate goal for a career?**
 - Look at what is necessary for that degree and start there! Certain disciplines only require a masters (e.g., MBA for business, MSW for social work) while others don't get you very far with only a masters (e.g., psychology).
 - Masters degrees can be expensive (~65,000 per year) but take less time to complete
 - PhD programs PAY YOU but take a long time to complete (5-7 years depending on discipline)
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THE PROCESS

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- **Due dates begin around 11/15 and go through the end of the calendar year (for PhD programs)**
- **Invitations are extended in December (generally)**
- **Interviews take place in January & February**
 - Virtual and in-person
- **Offers extended usually within a few weeks after interviews are over**
- **If you didn't receive an initial offer, don't fret! You may be on a waitlist**



THE APPLICATION

WHAT'S PART OF THE APPLICATION?*

- **Curriculum Vitae (CV)**
- **Personal Statement**
- **Letters of Recommendation**
- **GREs(?) - general test and/or specific test (psych)**

***Typically**

THE CURRICULUM VITAE (AKA ACADEMIC RESUME)

THE CURRICULUM VITAE (CV)

- **Education**
- **Academic Honors/Awards**
- **Research Experience**
- **Clinical Experience**
- **Research Presentations**
- **Manuscripts (if applicable)**
- **Extracurricular Activities**
- **Work Experience (if applicable)**

EDUCATION

BA California State University, Long Beach, Psychology May 2008
Graduated *summa cum laude* (gpa: 3.96), Honors Track
Minored in Music
Thesis: "Internalized Heterosexism, Coping, and Binge Drinking among Gay Men"
Advisor: Dr. Sherry Span

ACADEMIC HONORS AND AFFILIATIONS

Phi Beta Kappa 2006-2008
Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program 2007-2008
President's List, California State University, Long Beach 2003-2008
Golden Key International Society 2005-2008
National Society for Collegiate Scholars 2004-2008
University Honors Program 2003-2008
American Psychological Association – Student Affiliate 2007 to Present

ACADEMIC AWARDS

Award for Excellent Academic Achievement, Dept. of Psychology 2007, 2008
Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Scholarship (\$2800) 2007
Cultural Greek Council Highest GPA Scholar (\$100) 2006, 2007
Bob Cole Conservatory of Music Vocal Scholarship (\$3000) 2003
Governor's Scholarship (\$9500) 2003

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA May 2010 to Present
Health, Emotion, and Addiction Laboratory, Dr. Adam Leventhal, PI
Project Manager, (Sept 2011 to Present)

THE PERSONAL STATEMENT (AKA STATEMENT OF PURPOSE)

WHAT IS A PERSONAL STATEMENT?

- **A narrative of your experiences and how they have shaped your interest in a particular topic**
- **Your personal statement should be in line with the topic of your potential advisor but not be EXACTLY the same (they don't want a mini-me)**
- **What did you do, what did you learn, how did it change how you thought about a particular topic/idea**
 - Be specific here.



WHAT IS A PERSONAL STATEMENT?

- “I ran an experimental study that sought to understand how rejection clarity (ambiguous vs. explicit) and group membership (ingroup vs. outgroup) impacted rumination, negative affect, and risk-taking in Black and White identified individuals. I hypothesized that...For this study, participants (N=200) completed the Cyberball task where they believe they were being rejected (with certainty or ambiguously) by either a person of the same race or of a different race. Participants completed the Columbia Card Task after the interaction along with measures of affect and rumination. I ran a series of ANOVAs and found that...This went against previous literature in the field and suggests that...The result of this study were presented at the 2024 conference for...”
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WHAT IS A PERSONAL STATEMENT?

- **Should weave your story and insight about a topic together while also demonstrating your skillset (e.g., data analysis, presentation skills, research design, manuscript preparation, etc.)**
 - **Your personal statement should be in line with the topic of your potential advisor but not be **EXACTLY** the same (they don't want a mini-me)**
 - **It's not your CV in written form!**
 - Not every experience needs to go in your statement. Talk about the things most pertinent to your potential area of study
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LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

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➤ Who should write them?

- People that you think will be able to write positively about your character, insight, critical thinking ability, scholarly experience
- Good people are: faculty with whom you've done research or interned with in a clinical setting; Your boss (if working with them in a research capacity)
- Less ideal people are: faculty of a class you've taken once (unless you've interacted with them sufficiently and believe they know you quite well)

➤ Try to get a mix of faculty who can speak to different parts of your work

- Lab PI, SURG advisor, honors thesis advisor, clinical research supervisor



**WHAT SHOULD YOU LOOK
FOR IN A GRAD PROGRAM?**

THINGS TO CONSIDER (ALL PROGRAMS)...

➤ **Program structure**

- Course:research ratio (PhD programs emphasize research!)
- Type of training (kinds of courses, certificates?)

➤ **Compensation**

- Amount (consider location and QoL)
- Dependent on TA/RA-ship?

➤ **Location**

- Remember you want a life OUTSIDE of your grad program



THINGS TO CONSIDER (CLINICAL TRAINING)...



- **An accredited school**
 - Should be APA accredited for psychology programs
 - **% of people who match on internship**
 - Clinical programs ALSO require a one-year internship at a different institution after courses are done before you can graduate
 - “Matching” is based (in part) on clinical training
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WHAT TO CONSIDER IN AN ADVISOR

And what should really drive when choosing a program

- **Research fit** - close but not always complete overlap
 - **Tenure status** - Assistant versus Associate/Full
 - **Mentoring style** - Hands on or hands off?
 - **Collaboration** - Open to it or not? How important is this for you?
 - **Advising experience** - Where did their prior grad students go afterwards?
 - **Vibes** - Do you get a good feeling about them?
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**THIS IS GREAT AND ALL,
BUT WHEN DO I NEED TO
START PREPARING?!**

WHEN TO START THIS PROCESS

- **Programs/Advisors** - summer before applications are due!!
 - Reach out to potential advisors over summer to see if they're taking students
 - **Personal Statement/SOP** - start a draft during summer and get feedback early fall
 - **Letters of recommendation** - Early Fall semester (or as soon as you know)
 - You'll also likely get better letters when you give your letter writers more time
 - **GREs** - Take them end of summer so you have enough time to retake them before due dates if necessary
 - Subject specific exams are only offered certain times of the year (e.g., clinical psych)
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