## Tips for Applying to Graduate Programs

### Recommended Steps for Applicants to Psychology Graduate Programs

#### Timelines for Applying

If applying in the senior year, milestones include:

- **Summer**: narrow list of programs and due dates, prepare for GRE, draft statements of purpose
- **Early Fall**: finalize list of programs, contact faculty of interest, solicit feedback on essays, register and take GRE, order and send transcripts
- **Late Fall**: request letters of recommendation, complete application forms, and finalize essays
- **Nov/Dec**: submit applications; verify that all letters, transcripts, etc. have been received

#### Statements of Purpose

You will typically need to write a *statement of purpose* or other essays. To do so, we suggest:

- Brainstorming/clustering, outlining, creating a rough draft, revising, obtaining feedback, and then finalizing your statement or essay

For effective essays, we suggest the following:

- Tailor each essay to the program of interest, emphasizing your strengths, providing specific examples, writing clearly and transparently
- Avoiding negativity, vagueness, humor, and cliched writing and phrasing

#### Searching for Programs

The programs that you choose to apply to depend on your priorities. To find programs we suggest:

- Online databases (e.g., APA) and listings
- Published directories and graduate school guides
- Professional societies and APA divisions
- GRE Search Service, asking your mentors

Your choices may ultimately depend on:

- Program type (e.g., training model)
- Faculty/mentor match (e.g., accepting students?)
- Financial considerations (e.g., funding)
- Program life, other metrics (e.g., admit rate)

#### Recommendation Letters

We suggest requesting letters of recommendation six weeks before they are due; when requesting:

- Choose recommenders that know you very well.
- Ask whether they can write a “good” letter
- If they agree, provide all necessary background materials, such as transcripts, essays, and CVs
- Provide a clear summary of all programs you are applying and the letter due dates for each
- Request all of your letters at the same time
- Follow-up with your letter writers as due dates approach, and do so in a courteous manner

#### Admissions Criteria

Most programs are highly competitive and base their selection decisions on such factors as:

- Coursework, GPA, GRE, research experience, recommendation letters, other relevant work

Applications go through multiple rounds of review. After interviews, the most decisive criteria for acceptance decisions typically include:

- Publications or presentations, match in applicant’s skills and interests with the program and faculty of interest, statement of purpose, and the applicant’s prior research experience

#### Admissions Interviews

Interviews are the final hurdle before admission decisions are made. To succeed at interviews:

1. **Review**: reexamine your application materials, your own goals, and your knowledge of the program that you are interviewing at
2. **Research**: the program and faculty of interest in greater detail, think of questions you wish to ask during interviews, find out the interview format
3. **Practice**: conduct mock interviews, rehearse answers to potential questions, develop skill at answering questions fluently and naturally

For more information on applying to graduate research programs, please visit: [http://www.psychology.ucsd.edu/undergraduate-program/graduate-career-resources/index.html/](http://www.psychology.ucsd.edu/undergraduate-program/graduate-career-resources/index.html/)

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