

How To Apply to Psychology Graduate School: A Brief Overview

1. Explore helpful resources such as:

- a. The American Psychological Association's (APA) website: www.apa.org.
Go to APA's "Especially for Students" page: <http://www.apa.org/about/students.aspx>)
Make sure to look here; there's a lot of useful information, particularly:
"Getting into graduate school," which includes a section on "Applying to Grad School."
- b. If you're interested in clinical or counseling psychology (the subfields that include training to do psychotherapy), a great resource is Sayette and Norcross's An Insider's Guide to Graduate Programs in Clinical and Counseling Psychology. We have copies in the Psychology Dept Office (RNS 236) that students can check out, or if you're pretty sure that this is the direction you want to pursue, you might want to buy a copy for yourself (the cost is between \$20-\$30). This book comes out in a new edition about every two years, and includes chapters describing what clinical psychology, counseling psychology, and related fields are; how to prepare for graduate school; and how to select and apply to schools. In addition, it lists graduate programs in clinical and counseling psychology, giving basic facts about each program including entering students' average GPA and GRE scores.
- c. You can check out from the Psychology Department office (RNS 236) helpful books like:
 - Graduate Study in Psychology – written by APA,
 - Getting In: A Step-by-Step Plan for Gaining Admission to Graduate School in Psychology, also written by APA. (Or of course you can buy these sorts of books.)
- d. Your friendly St. Olaf Psychology profs will be happy to talk with you! Just contact us.

2. Typically you apply to study a specific *subfield* of psychology. Therefore, you will need to **decide which psychology subfield** (e.g., clinical, cognitive, counseling, developmental, industrial/organizational, neuroscience, personality, school psychology, social, etc.) interests you most. To get a handle on what these different subfields are, check out the APA website's helpful "Careers in Psychology" webpage: www.apa.org/careers/resources/guides/careers which includes a list that briefly defines many of the different subfields within psychology.

To help you decide on subfields, think about your own interests. What psychology courses or topics have you found really interesting? The answer to that question can be a good clue regarding what subfield of psychology you might pursue. Also think about what it is you would like to do *after* you get your graduate degree. Which of the subfields' definitions fits you best?

3. Think about **factors that matter to you** (e.g., location, specific topics within psychology) and check resources such as those listed above to begin **figuring out what schools** offer graduate programs in your chosen subfield. As part of your exploration of various schools, look at **graduate schools' websites** to get information on their graduate program in your chosen subfield of psychology and to **learn their application process**.

4. It is a very good idea to **identify specific faculty** at a given graduate school whose work looks interesting to you. Faculty-student match is important in graduate school.

5. In graduate school you can get a **masters degree (M.A.) or a doctoral degree (Ph.D. or Psy.D.)** Masters degrees often require 1.5-2 years of school; doctoral degrees typically require 5

years or more. Decide which type of degree, masters (M.A.) or doctoral (Ph.D. or PsyD), you want to pursue. For example, if you want to have an independent psychotherapy practice, you → will probably need a doctoral degree (either Ph.D. or Psy.D.) in clinical or counseling psychology. Which degree is needed for the type of work you want ultimately to do?

6. Regardless of whether you want a masters or a doctorate, you likely will need to **take the GRE** (the Graduate Record Exam) no later than during the Fall prior to the year you want to start graduate school. For information on the GRE, check out its webpage at www.ets.org/gre/. Specifically, you will need to take the *GRE General Test*, which is somewhat like the SAT and has verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning, and analytical writing sections. Depending on the requirements of the schools to which you are applying, you also may need to take the *GRE Subject Test* in Psychology (not required as often), which tests your knowledge of the whole range of psychology. Instructions on how to register to take the GRE are given on the GRE website.

It's a very good idea to spend some time studying & practicing for the GRE. The GRE website has helpful information at: https://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/prepare/. You can study on your own, using such on-line resources or a published GRE study-book (can purchase on-line or may be available in Rolvaag), or you can take a GRE preparatory class. The first options are free, except for the cost of the book; the preparatory class will cost more money.

7. **Applying to schools** will take significant time and effort on your part. For students who are applying while they are still students at St. Olaf, you should think of this as almost like an extra course! Most schools will require you to submit:

- A non-refundable application fee.

- A completed application form for their school.

- A personal statement/ letter of intent. Take time to write a good essay; it matters! While much of your essay can be the same for all the schools to which you are applying, make sure to include some indication of why this particular school is attractive to you.

- Official transcript. Contact the Registrar to have them send your transcript.

- Recommendation letters. Usually you will need three letters of reference, usually from profs, (occasionally employers). The more your professor knows about your past experience and your goals, the better letter he or she can write for you, *so tell him/her these things!* It's a good idea to give your recommenders written information about yourself such as a list of relevant experiences or resume.

Some schools (especially clinical programs) will, after reviewing students' applications, select a subset of students for a personal interview, often in-person, but sometimes over the phone. An in-person visit might last 1-2 days, and often the program will arrange for you to spend the night for free at one of their graduate student's homes. Generally you will need to pay for your transportation to the interview. The Piper Center might have money to help with this, so when you get to this point, you could check with them.

Make sure to note schools' application deadlines; the school won't consider you unless all of your application materials are in by that date. Some have deadlines as early as November.

8. Schools will notify you about acceptance before April 15th. You then must accept or reject any offers made to you by April 15th. If you get into a program that you like, congratulations! If you are not accepted into the programs to which you applied, however, don't despair. You can always apply again next year, and in fact it is often easier to get into psychology graduate school if you have some post-college experience. Many now-successful psychologists, including some of your own St Olaf professors, did not get accepted to grad school the first time that they applied!