Deciding to Apply and Successfully Gaining Admission to Graduate Schools in Psychology

2

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Psychology is the most popular major on a large proportion of college campuses. Many thousands of students apply to graduate schools with hopes of pursuing a career in the science or practice of mental health services. Yet, as compared to other types of graduate programs (e.g., law, medicine), remarkably little information is available to help students determine the career path that offers the best match to their interests. Specific practical advice on how to successfully navigate the application process also is lacking.

This chapter is designed to provide an overview of different types of possible career options in the behavioral sciences and mental health industry. Especially detailed information is provided for the most common option in the world of psychology doctoral programs: the clinical psychology doctoral (Ph.D.) program.

An important disclaimer should be mentioned here. The text in this chapter focuses mostly on our opinions and impressions of the current state of the field and of the application process for psychology graduate programs. In no way should this informal advice be used to replace actual data or specific information provided by professional organizations in the mental health field, individual doctoral programs, or even advice from other professionals. We feel best prepared to comment on Ph.D. programs in clinical psychology, especially those that subscribe to the scientist–practitioner or clinical science models of training. Our experience is exclusively with the admission processes and training goals of these types of programs, and we cannot speak directly to programs that have adopted distinctly different training models. We also have relatively less experience with training programs in nonclinical subdisciplines of psychology. In many places, we have offered links to websites that can provide more detailed information.

Do You Really Want To Be a Psychologist?

When students ask us for professional development advice regarding graduate school, they usually have already determined that they would like to apply to doctoral programs in psychology. Very often, students are interested in clinical psychology. Indeed, applications to clinical psychology programs often outnumber applications to all other types of psychology doctoral programs combined. At many universities, clinical doctoral programs receive 100–600 applications. Far fewer apply to programs in developmental, social, cognitive, biological, and quantitative psychology programs, roughly in descending order of popularity. This apparent preference for clinical

Excerpts of this chapter are reprinted from "Mitch's Uncensored Advice for Applying to Graduate School in Clinical Psychology" with permission from Mitch Prinstein, Ph.D.

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M.J. Prinstein (ed.), *The Portable Mentor: Expert Guide to a Successful Career in Psychology, Second Edition*, DOI 10.1007/978-1-4614-3994-3_2,

psychology often is based on students' general desire to work as a therapist, perhaps in a private practice type of setting (e.g., a home office or group practice). Sometimes, students will state an interest in research. Other times, students might indicate that they are somewhat afraid of statistics and "turned off" by the idea of writing a dissertation.

We would say that these impressions of the field of clinical psychology, and of the training activities included during graduate school, are somewhat accurate, but in some ways quite inaccurate. An accurate and thorough description of the field of clinical psychology is somewhat difficult to articulate because the field is changing quite dramatically and quickly. Nevertheless, we think it is important to briefly reconsider what your career goals are (or at least what you are *not* interested in) before talking about graduate applications and deciding on the type of doctoral program that is the best match. We divide this portion of the chapter into two sections: a discussion of careers that include the option for clinical practice and a discussion of careers that do not involve work as a practitioner.

Careers with a Practice Option

Let us assume that you know that you are interested in gaining training as a practitioner and you are intrigued by the mental health field. There are then at least six different mental health fields and many different graduate degrees available to you to pursue these interests. The differences between these fields and degrees are quite dramatic. Each involves somewhat distinct training expectations and opportunities as well as different types of career activities.

Are you interested in research? Teaching? Practicing (e.g., offering therapy or conducting assessments)? Consulting? Mentoring students? Working with young children? Adolescents? Do you want to work in a hospital? A university? A teaching college? An elementary or secondary school? A business corporation? Who will your colleagues be?

What kind of job stability do you want? What salary? A consistent salary or one based on billable hours?

How many years are you willing to dedicate towards training? Are you willing to move, perhaps several times, in order to complete all aspects of training?

Not sure yet? Keep reading for more details about which options may be a good match.

You can also find resources on the Careers page of the American Psychological Association's website: http://www.apa.org/careers/resources/guides/careers.aspx.

We will offer some brief descriptions (and links) to discuss the six fields below. These fields are summarized in Table 2.1.

1. Social Work (Terminal Master's or Doctoral degree)
2. School Psychology (Terminal Master's or Doctoral degree)
3. Master's in General Psychology (note: work as an independent practitioner rarely is possible with this option)
4. Counseling Psychology (Doctoral degree)
5. Child Psychiatry (Medical degree)
6. Clinical Psychology (Doctoral degree)

For doctoral degrees in clinical psychology, we also will offer some comments on the choice between a Ph.D. degree and a Psy.D. degree.

Social Work

What do social workers do? The Master's in Social Work (MSW) is a very versatile degree. Social workers can be involved in many different types of careers and settings. Visit the websites of the National Association of Social Workers (http://www.naswdc.org/ and http://www.helpstartshere.org/). As you will see on these websites, the many fields within social work include: *Social Caseworkers* (also known as case managers, work within health and community service settings to coordinate the resources received by individuals and their families), *Medical Social Workers* (work with a variety of patients and their families in health care facilities), *School Social Workers* (work in school settings to provide emotional and structural support to facilitate students'

Table 2.1 Subfields of psychology with a practice component

Subfield	Degrees offered	Brief summary of subfield	Major organizations and websites associated with subfield
Social Work	Master's (MSW), Doctorate (DSW or Ph.D)	Many roles and settings including casework, social policy and research, community organizing, administration and management, school and private practice	National Association of Social Workers (http://www.naswdc.org/ and http://www.helpstartshere.org/)
School Psychology	Master's, Doctorate (Ph.D. or Psy.D.)	Help children and youth succeed in the school setting academically and emotionally	National Association of School Psychologists (http://www.nasponline.org/)
Counseling Psychology	Doctorate (Ph.D. or Psy.D.)	Assess and treat a variety of populations with life stress and psychological disorders in private practice and counseling centers; less emphasis on severe disorders and research	American Psychological Association, Division 17 (http://www.div17.org/students.html)
Psychiatry	Medical Doctorate (MD)	Assess and treat a variety of populations with psychological disorders, with emphasis on psychotropic medications and the medical model; little emphasis on research	American Psychiatric Association (http://www.psych.org/)
Clinical Psychology	Doctorate (Ph.D. or Psy.D.)	Many roles and settings including assessments and therapy, research, and teaching of psychological disorders	American Psychological Association, Division 12 (http://www.div12.org/)
Industrial and Organizational Psychology	Master's, Doctorate (Ph.D.)	Studies psychology as applied to the workplace, including optimal performance, management, and organizational development	American Psychological Association, Division 14 (http://www.siop.org/)

education), *Clinical Social Workers* (work in mental health care settings to provide therapy and counseling), *Administration and Management* (organize and superintend larger structures that offer social services), *Community Organization* (collaborate with members of the community to address gaps within existing service systems), *Social Policy and Research* (engage in research to identify social issues and develop policies to address those issues).

What is the training like? Although you can obtain a doctorate in social work (DSW or Ph.D.), it is completely possible to be an autonomous, practicing social worker with a Master's degree. With only 2 years of schooling (plus an internship), it also can be a quick way to get into the workforce. Master's programs generally can accept a much higher proportion of applicants for admission than doctoral programs (in either social work or psychology); thus, it is somewhat easier to gain admission if going this route.

School Psychology

What do school psychologists do? The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP; http://www.nasponline.org/) has a great website that describes the field, the roles, and the salaries of school psychologists. School psychologists generally are focused on helping children succeed in the school setting, both academically and emotionally. Most work in a school setting. Their work can involve individual consultation with children and families, designing programs to assist teachers with specialized classroom instruction needs, and program development to help train basic skills like anger management and social skills. In these ways, school psychologists are like the ambassadors of psychology in a school setting. When a child is experiencing difficulties, if there is a crisis in the school (e.g., trauma, death), or if administrators are setting a policy that will affect children's educational lives, school psychologists are there to ensure that psychological

well-being is maintained and to help educate other professionals on children's psychological needs or limitations.

Another major task for many school psychologists is to conduct assessments of children's academic and social–emotional functioning. Every child who may be eligible for giftedness placement, or for learning disability (LD) services, needs to be evaluated using standardized assessments. School psychologists typically are the only professionals within the school setting with the training to administer and interpret these types of standardized assessments. LD evaluations in particular have important implications not only for children but also for school policy and funding. Public law mandates that children receive the services they need to obtain an adequate education, and each child meeting LD criteria must have an individualized educational plan developed and evaluated periodically. School psychologists often serve the lead role in this endeavor.

What is the training like? You may have heard that to practice as a psychologist, you must have a doctoral degree. That is true for all fields except school psychology. School psychologists can be hired with a Master's degree (plus a yearlong internship). This may be, in part, because there is a tremendous shortage of school psychologists working in the USA, and the field is reducing barriers to getting new, bright students into the profession! Keep in mind, however, that Master's-level school psychologists are not able to practice autonomously; but they can be hired and even tenured within a public school system (e.g., elementary, middle, or high school).

Master's in General Psychology

What is the master's in general psychology? There are not too many terminal Master's programs in psychology left, but those that exist offer a nice option for students who wish to gain advanced experience in psychology before pursuing a doctoral degree. Each Master's program varies in its training goals. However, many offer graduate coursework and require the completion of a Master's thesis to obtain a degree. Programs typically last 1–2 years.

There are benefits and drawbacks to the terminal Master's degree. The good news is that this is an opportunity for structured education in psychology. The coursework is taught at the graduate level and may even include some specialty work (e.g., training in clinical psychology specifically). The Master's thesis offers an opportunity to learn more about psychological research. Students who did not major in psychology during their undergrad years, had a low GPA in college, or who feel like their interests are not yet well-developed, may find this structured educational opportunity enormously helpful.

Unfortunately, the terminal Master's degree in itself does not offer many career options. It should be noted that many doctoral programs in psychology offer a Master's degree en route to the doctoral degree. Thus, within the 4–6 years of doctoral training, a Master's thesis may be required, and the degree will be granted—somewhat marking the half-way point of doctoral training. The terminal Master's degree is different. Many students in terminal Master's programs go on to a doctoral program. Some of these doctoral programs will credit the time in the terminal Master's program towards the doctoral training requirements (e.g., some courses or the need to write a new thesis may be waived). However, other doctoral programs will not waive requirements; thus, there is the potential for some repetition in training. A final drawback pertains to the cost of training. Many schools will charge tuition for terminal Master's training. In contrast, most Ph.D. doctoral programs in psychology waive tuition and typically offer a stipend. Thus, for students who are certain that they are interested in doctoral training and can gain admission into a Ph.D. program, the terminal Master's may not always be a wise option. However, for other students, this can be a very valuable experience!

Counseling Psychology

What is counseling psychology? The American Psychological Association's Division 17 is specifically focused on Counseling Psychology. This division's website has a section specifically dedicated to students with pertinent information (http://www.div17.org/students.html).

A long time ago, a clear distinction between clinical psychology and counseling psychology was offered. The field of clinical psychology was meant to address serious mental illness, such as any of the disorders that might be found in the DSM. In contrast, counseling psychology sometimes was referred to as a field that addressed "normal people with normal problems," often including vocational counseling.

This distinction remains somewhat true, but the boundaries between clinical and counseling psychology are certainly a bit more blurred. Both require a doctoral degree for independent work. Both are referred to among the public as "therapists" or "psychologists." And few potential clients discriminate between the fields when selecting a therapist. A great many clinical psychologists primarily offer "counseling" to clients with no obvious DSM symptoms. Counseling psychologists also have substantial contact with individuals who meet criteria for some specific disorders (e.g., depression, anxiety, substance use, and eating disorders, for instance).

Counseling psychologists may work in private practice; they also often work in counseling centers (e.g., College Student Mental Health Services, Community Clinics, Community Mental Health Centers). Some counseling psychologists also work in academia as professors or clinical supervisors in counseling psychology graduate programs. Counseling psychologists also can conduct and interpret assessments.

To a large extent, counseling psychologists and counseling graduate training programs are less heavily involved in research activities than are clinical psychologists. Counseling psychologists also are less likely to work as professors within university departments of psychology or as instructors in undergraduate classes (but they may work in schools or departments of education). As compared to clinical psychologists, counseling psychologists also are less likely to work with severe forms of mental illness, such as autism, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, etc. See the web link above for more information on counseling psychology, its mission, and training emphases.

What is the training like? Like clinical psychology, counseling psychology requires a doctoral degree. Doctoral programs typically require 4–6 years to complete in addition to a yearlong internship. A dissertation is required, although the research expectations for this project sometimes are lower as compared to the clinical psychology dissertation. Counseling programs often involve more coursework and practical than clinical psychology programs.

Psychiatry

As you may already be aware, the fields of psychiatry and clinical psychology have some overlap in the types of patients or clients who are seen, the types of services offered, and the types of settings in which members of these professions may work. However, several prominent differences exist between psychiatrists and clinical psychologists; these are briefly outlined here.

First, psychiatry is a medical specialty requiring a medical degree (MD), an internship, and a residency (and sometimes a fellowship as well). In contrast, clinical psychologists obtain a doctorate degree (either Ph.D. or Psy.D.) in clinical psychology and complete an internship and an additional year of supervised clinical experience before obtaining licensure.

Second, psychiatry has traditionally focused on the use of psychotropic medications more than psychosocial treatments (e.g., therapy) to ameliorate mental health symptoms, while the opposite is true for clinical psychology. Many psychiatrists do conduct therapy, although some may use a somewhat different approach that relies on a different theoretical discipline than is emphasized in clinical psychology. Likewise, some states in the USA now are allowing clinical psychologists to obtain prescription authority. Within the next decade, many psychologists may live in regions that will allow them to prescribe medications to their clients. However, psychologists' training regarding medications will likely be less thorough in scope than the training offered within psychiatry programs.

Third, the majority of clinical psychology training programs adopt a scientist–practitioner or clinical science training model. This model emphasizes both the science and practice of psychology based on the premise that these educational

experiences reciprocally inform one another and are conjointly needed to produce a qualified professional. In contrast, training models in psychiatry typically do not subscribe to scientist–practitioner models; few involve research training or activities.

Clinical Psychology Ph.D. Degree

Many describe the clinical psychology Ph.D. degree as one of the most versatile graduate degrees available. Clinical psychologists with a Ph.D. degree are qualified to work as practicing clinicians, professors in academia conducting research or teaching, consultants, and supervisors to other mental health professionals.

As described above, clinical psychologists often are trained in scientist–practitioner programs (often referred to as the Boulder model of training). However, this model often causes some confusion among students evaluating career options. In a scientist–practitioner model (or the distinct "clinical science" model, see below), students are trained as both researchers and practitioners. In other words, in addition to the research expertise required to complete a Master's thesis and dissertation, students' experiences include many "clinical hours" conducting assessments and therapy in a variety of structured, supervised clinical placements to develop practitioner skills. Doctoral Ph.D. programs almost exclusively are located within university departments of psychology that employ clinical psychology professors who themselves are dedicated largely towards research and teaching endeavors. Thus, many clinical psychology Ph.D. students feel that they receive excellent exposure to research experiences during graduate school, and perhaps even implicit pressure to pursue a research-oriented career following graduate studies. Indeed, many graduate programs specifically examine graduate applications for information confirming an interest in research.

Yet, the majority of graduates of clinical psychology Ph.D. programs nevertheless pursue careers that involve primarily practitioner experiences. *This raises a common question regarding the pursuit of a Ph.D. degree in clinical psychology: Is this the best option for you if you are not at all interested in research*?

The short answer is: No. But a longer answer is necessary.

The scientist–practitioner model is based on the idea that clinical psychologists should have expertise in both science and practice. It also is based on the idea that education in both areas is necessary to be fully competent in either. The model suggests that a psychologist who is unable to critically evaluate theories and methods related to practice will be inadequate as a clinician. Similarly, a researcher who has not had exposure to actual clients experiencing psychopathology will be unable to develop and test appropriate hypotheses regarding psychological symptoms or treatment.

An apt analogy may come from a description of graduate training in law. Many who have pursued a law degree state that the curriculum is not specifically designed to teach trial room strategies or jury selection techniques, etc., but rather, that graduate training is meant to help students learn "to think like a lawyer."

Doctoral Ph.D. training often is based on the idea that students must learn to "think like a psychologist." This means that students must be extremely comfortable with the scientific method, including the generation of hypotheses, the development of standardized procedures that can be used to evaluate these hypotheses, and the ability to draw appropriate conclusions that may inform future hypotheses. These skills are necessary not only for research endeavors but also when interacting in a therapeutic context. Case conceptualization skills involve a similar set of procedures as described above, and it is this approach that necessitates dual training as a scientist–practitioner during graduate school in clinical psychology. Unlike law school, however, graduate school in clinical psychology involves direct application of coursework learning in real-world situations. Within a year of admission in most programs, clinical psychology graduate students will begin seeing clients, conducting assessments, and offering treatment (all with supervision, of course).

Thus, the reason why many Ph.D. graduate programs emphasize and even select students who are interested in research is because it is believed that research training helps students

develop the critical thinking skills that are needed in any activity as a clinical psychologist.

Having said this, it is important to note that research training is a major emphasis of the graduate curriculum (including a Master's thesis, dissertation, etc.). Students who do not enjoy research or the research process will not be happy graduate students. Students who do not anticipate any openness to the possibility of conducting research in their careers, even if only as a small proportion of their job responsibilities, also may not be a good match for Ph.D. training. It is important to be very honest with yourself at this stage in your professional development. The Ph.D. application process is somewhat arduous, and graduate training can be demanding. It is very important to carefully determine whether this is a good match for you.

The "Clinical Science" Option in Clinical Psychology

Although most doctoral programs in clinical psychology have adopted the "Boulder Model" or "Scientist–Practitioner Model" of training, an increasing number of programs have adopted a philosophy that emphasizes scientific training above clinical practice. Specifically, these programs have a unified commitment emphasizing the promotion, training, and dissemination of clinical psychology as a scientific discipline. Clinical science programs therefore emphasize training in evidence-based treatments (i.e., those that have substantial evidence supporting their efficacy) and offer opportunities for students to gain exceptionally strong training in cutting-edge research methods. Many of the philosophies of the clinical science movement are reflected in the writings of Dr. Dick McFall, which can be found through the website of the Society for a Science of Clinical Psychology (SSCP), in the About the Society section: http://sites.google.com/site/sscp-website/Home/manifesto-for-a-science-of-clinical-psychology. Clinical psychology programs that have successfully adopted a clinical science training perspective are members of the Academy of Psychological Clinical Science; a list of these programs can be found on the Members page of the Academy's website: http://acadpsychclinicalscience.org/index.php?page=members. The astute student may notice that Academy member programs also are among the most popular in the country, receiving perhaps more applications than non-Academy programs on average. Clinical science programs are believed to produce more graduates who pursue academic careers in clinical psychology and who are more likely to offer evidence-based treatment options to their clients in practice.

Research and Clinical Work in Clinical Psychology

Perhaps you still are unsure whether you are interested in research or you would like to know more about different possibilities for research activity in clinical psychology. This section discusses three clinical psychology subfields that offer distinct opportunities for research and clinical work.

Most clinical psychology programs offer experiences that could be broadly categorized as fitting the subfields of Clinical Child/Adolescent, Clinical Adult, or Clinical Health Psychology (or combinations, such as Child Health Psychology). Some programs have specific "tracks" or "concentrations" in these subfields, and some offer more varied experiences across two or more of these areas in a more generalist training model. A brief description of each is included below.

Clinical Child/Adolescent Psychology

Clinical child/adolescent psychology generally is concerned with psychopathology among youth, such as the types of disorders that are discussed in the DSM. Note: although many refer to the field using the term "clinical child psychology," research and clinical work usually involves exposure to youth at all developmental levels, including infants, toddlers, school-aged youth, and adolescents. Clinical child/adolescent psychologists may work as practitioners, work in academia as professors, or work in a variety of settings (e.g., universities, medical centers, counseling

centers) in which research, teaching, and/or clinical work is possible.

Examples of clinical child/adolescent psychology research and clinical work: Much of the work done by clinical child/adolescent psychologists can be organized into general themes of psychological symptoms:

Externalizing disorders (e.g., conduct disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, ADHD)

Internalizing disorders (e.g., anxiety, depression)

Mental retardation and pervasive developmental disorders (e.g., autism)

Serious mental illness (e.g., childhood schizophrenia, bipolar disorder)

For each disorder, there are bodies of literature that examine:

(a) Causes and consequences of symptoms, including (1) the study of individual biological, cognitive, and social factors that may be associated with symptoms and (2) the study of family, peer, school, community, or cultural factors that may affect the onset, presentation, maintenance, or reduction of symptoms.
(b) Efficacious and effective modes of treatment (i.e., different theoretical orientations), including factors that may modify treatment efficacy, or specific therapist and client behaviors that affect the outcome of therapy.
(c) Prevention strategies.
(d) Comorbidity.
(e) Increasingly, research in this area has integrated findings on biological, neurological, and genetic factors that may interact with psychosocial factors in the course of each disorder.

A good idea is to visit the website for the *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology* (www.jccap.net) or the *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* (http://www.springerlink.com/content/104756/), or to examine these journals using the PsycInfo tool at your university's website. Read over the titles and abstracts of some recent issues, and you will get a good sense for the kind of research that clinical child/adolescent psychologists do.

Clinical Adult Psychology

Much like clinical child/adolescent psychology, clinical adult psychology also generally is concerned with psychopathology; however, the population of interest typically is above 18 years of age. Psychologists interested in working with the elderly specifically may focus on *geropsychology*. Clinical adult psychologists represent the majority of all clinical psychologists, although interest in the three subfields of clinical psychology has been becoming more evenly distributed in recent years. Like clinical child/adolescent psychologists, clinical adult psychologists may work in a variety of settings (e.g., universities, medical centers, counseling centers) in which research, teaching, and/or clinical work is possible.

Examples of clinical adult psychology research and clinical work: Clinical adult psychologists' work also is often divided by disorder and diagnosis. Perhaps the most common themes of research and clinical work in clinical adult psychology include:

Mood and anxiety disorders (e.g., OCD, phobias, depression)

Axis II (personality) disorders (e.g., borderline, narcissism, antisocial)

Substance use disorders—sometimes included in Clinical Health Psychology

Eating disorders—sometimes included in Clinical Health Psychology

Serious mental illness (e.g., schizophrenia, bipolar disorder)

For each disorder, there are bodies of literature that examine:

(a) Causes and consequences of symptoms including (1) the study of individual biological, cognitive, social factors that may be associated with symptoms and (2) the study of family, community, or cultural factors that may affect the onset, presentation, maintenance, or reduction of symptoms.
(b) Different modalities of treatment that may be useful for reducing symptoms in adults, such as individual, group, or couples treatment.
(c) Efficacious and effective approaches of treatment (i.e., different theoretical orientations),

including factors that may modify treatment efficacy, or specific therapist and client behaviors that affect the outcome of therapy.

(d) Comorbidity.

(e) Increasingly, research in this area has integrated findings on biological, neurological, and genetic factors that may interact with psychosocial factors in the course of disorder.

A quick review of the table of contents in the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* (http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/abn/) or the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* (http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/ccp/) will help to gain a greater sense of the types of research areas that are common in clinical adult psychology. These journals also include articles on clinical child/adolescent psychology and clinical health psychology.

Clinical Health Psychology

Clinical health psychology also is concerned with psychopathology, but with a particular emphasis on symptoms or adjustment that is related to some aspect of physical health. Clinical health psychologists interested in working with youth are referred to as *pediatric psychologists.* Clinical health psychologists tend to work in general hospital settings more often than do other clinical psychologists. However, clinical health psychologists also may open a private practice or work in academia as professors, and both options offer a wide range of areas for research and clinical work. Some examples are discussed below.

Examples of clinical health psychology research and clinical work: Much of the work done in clinical health psychology is associated with one of the following questions:

1. Do individuals with a physical illness (e.g., cancer, HIV) or physiological irregularity (e.g., chromosomal abnormality) experience psychological adjustment difficulties?
2. Can psychological interventions be used to help increase individuals' adherence to medical regimens (e.g., for diabetes, asthma)?
3. Can psychological interventions be used to help reduce health symptoms (e.g., encopresis, pain associated with medical procedures)?
4. What factors are associated with individuals' engagement in health risk or injurious behaviors, such as substance use, sexual risk behaviors, and weight-related behaviors?
5. What is the association between psychological and physical health (e.g., stress, immunity)?

Be sure to check out *Health Psychology* (http://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/hea/index.aspx) or the *Journal of Pediatric Psychology* (http://jpepsy.oxfordjournals.org/) for some specific examples of work in this area.

The Ph.D. Versus the Psy.D.

A final issue to discuss pertains to two types of doctoral degrees that are available in clinical, counseling, and school psychology. All of the information above describing doctoral training has been focused specifically on the Ph.D. degree. However, a separate option exists for doctoral training. Although we are not experts on this type of degree, we have offered a general description of this option below.

The Psy.D. was developed as a new type of doctoral degree several decades ago in response to some opposition regarding the "Boulder Model" (i.e., scientist–practitioner). Specifically, it was argued by some that the training in science was not necessary to become a practicing clinician, and a new training model largely emphasizing clinical work was developed.

Today many Psy.D. programs are available. Like other doctoral degrees, Psy.D. programs typically take about 4–6 years to complete (plus an internship year). The vast majority of training experiences are clinical in nature as well as some coursework. Some programs require a "dissertation" document; however, this usually is smaller in scope than what is expected in Ph.D. programs.

Many students ask whether Psy.D. programs are less prestigious than Ph.D. programs. Although it is difficult to comment on this specifically, there are some important differences between these programs that should be noted.

As mentioned above, Ph.D. programs are almost exclusively located within university settings, which are not-for-profit institutions. Some

Psy.D. programs, however, are located in for-profit institutions, such as freestanding "Professional Schools of Psychology." Some of these professional schools have names that include the word "university," however, upon close inspection, it is evident that such universities have no departments or units other than psychology. While most Ph.D. programs typically waive tuition costs for graduate students and offer assistantships that provide a modest annual stipend (typically between $12,000 and $18,000), many Psy.D. programs charge tuition to students, which can cost approximately $10,000–$20,000 annually.

There currently are no formal rankings of doctoral programs in clinical psychology that are generally considered to be reliable or valid. However, attempts have been made to document the quality of graduate programs in a variety of ways. For example, since all North American psychologists who wish to obtain a license to practice must take a standardized exam (called the EPPP), one metric for examining the quality of graduate training and graduate admissions may be to compare average scores on the EPPP among graduates of each program. Results from this analysis, conducted over 10 years ago, can be found on the website of the Social Psychology Network, at http://www.social-psychology.org/clinrank1997.htm. These data should be interpreted with caution. In addition, the rates of admission to doctoral programs and the rates of successful placement of graduate students into APA-accredited predoctoral internships can be examined at these sites (http://www.unc.edu/~mjp1970/Admissions%20Rates.pdf and http://www.unc.edu/~mjp1970/Internship%20Outcomes.pdf) can be examined closely. Across all data, a notable trend is evident. The average EPPP scores, admission rates, and successful internship placement rates from Psy.D. programs are less favorable than from Ph.D. programs.

Overall, the Psy.D. option can be an excellent choice for students who are interested in obtaining a doctoral degree in psychology and have decided that they do not wish to be involved in research—either during graduate training or during their career. However, the Psy.D. option should be exercised cautiously. Some very high quality programs are available (often those that are at not-for-profit institutions), and excellent training is certainly possible. However, applicants will need to do their homework to thoroughly investigate the adequacy of training if pursuing this type of degree.

The Council of University Directors of Clinical Psychology (CUDCP) has produced a set of guidelines for students who are interested in pursuing clinical psychology careers. This document can be found on the website of the CUDCP, under Graduate Training: http://cudcp.us/files/Reports/CUDCP_2011_Psy_Grad_School_Fact_sheet.pdf.

Careers Focusing Exclusively on Science, Without Practitioner Training

There are many possible graduate pursuits in psychology that do not involve work as a practitioner. Each of these subdisciplines offers rich opportunities for careers in behavioral science as well as policy, prevention, and education. Increasingly, these subdisciplines of psychology have begun to have important influences on many professional fields outside of psychology.

Most undergraduate departments of psychology have one or more faculty who represent subdisciplines within the field, such as social, biological, cognitive, developmental, experimental, quantitative, developmental, or community psychology. Each of these areas can be pursued for a graduate degree (although few community programs remain). Just a few examples of these types of options are offered below. See Table 2.2 for a list of the major scientific subfields of psychology.

What is the training like? For all of these programs discussed in this section, doctoral training is similar to clinical psychology doctoral training in many ways. All involve 4–6 years of training, coursework, a Master's thesis, and a dissertation. Doctoral training in developmental, social, cognitive, biological, and quantitative programs does not involve any clinical practicum work, and there is no clinical internship year.

Table 2.2 Subfields of psychology focusing exclusively on science (without a practice component)

Subfield	Degrees offered	Brief summary of subfield	Major organizations and websites associated with subfield
General Psychology	Master's	Offers advanced training in general psychology for students who wish to gain more experience prior to pursuing a doctoral degree	N/A—search for individual programs
Developmental Psychology	Doctorate (Ph.D.)	Studies behavior as it changes across the life span (mostly in children and adolescents)	American Psychological Association, Division 7 (http://ecp.fiu.edu/apa/div7/)
Social Psychology	Doctorate (Ph.D.)	Studies social and group influences on individual behavior	American Psychological Association, Division 8 (http://www.spsp.org/)
Behavioral Neuroscience	Doctorate (Ph.D.)	Studies the biology of behavior, including the role of the brain in regulating behavior	American Psychological Association, Division 6 (http://www.apadivisions.org/division-6/index.aspx)
Experimental Psychology	Doctorate (Ph.D.)	Studies many fields of psychology including sensation and perception, learning, conditioning, motivation, and emotion	American Psychological Association, Division 3 (http://www.apa.org/divisions/div3/)
Quantitative Psychology	Doctorate (Ph.D.)	Studies methods, research design, and statistics as applied to all areas of psychology	American Psychological Association, Division 5 (http://www.apa.org/divisions/div5/)
Cognitive Psychology	Doctorate (Ph.D.)	Studies internal mental processes including memory, reasoning, language, information processing, and decision making	Psychonomic Society: http://www.psychonomic.org/ Cognitive Neuroscience Society: http://www.cogneurosociety.org/

Developmental Psychology

What is a developmental psychologist? Developmental psychology is a scientific discipline that is focused specifically on the study of changes in behavior and cognition across the life span. The majority of work done in developmental psychology is on infants, children, and adolescents, although there is some research on emerging adulthood, middle adulthood, and geriatric issues. Developmental psychologists are interested in understanding topics such as cognitive, language, motor, social, emotional, and moral development, focusing both on characterizing the abilities of individuals at different ages as well as on factors that may influence developmental change. Moreover, the field is invested in understanding both intra-individual (i.e., even including neuroscience mechanisms) and inter-individual (i.e., parental, peer, school, community, and cultural) influences on development.

As a scientific field, developmental psychology does not involve clinical practice. However, many programs do have an emphasis on studies of prevention programs. If this is of interest, it is good to look out for programs emphasizing "applied developmental psychology" and information indicating research on prevention and intervention strategies (e.g., Head Start, Anti-Bullying campaigns). Thus, a developmental psychologist can be involved in research on the development or effectiveness of interventions. However, developmental graduate programs do not offer training to individuals who want to be licensed as a clinician (i.e., who want to conduct clinical assessments or therapy). Thus, these programs are specifically geared towards students with an interest in pursuing a strictly research and/or teaching career, either in a research center or as a professor in an academic position. Developmental psychologists also may work in settings that can affect policy at local, state, or national levels.

Read the table of contents in *Child Development* (http://www.wiley.com/bw/journal.asp?ref=0009-3920) or *Developmental Psychology* (http://

www.apa.org/pubs/journals/dev/index.aspx) to learn more about this subdiscipline. More information can be found from Division 7 of the APA: http://ecp.fiu.edu/apa/div7/?a. The Society for Research on Child Development (www.srcd.org) also offers useful information.

Social Psychology

What is a social psychologist? Many students think that social psychology involves the study of interpersonal relationships; however, this is only part of the story. More accurately, social psychology focuses on the manner in which individuals behave in the context of group influences. This may involve work on peer group influences, prejudice, political messaging, social cognition, attitude formation, and persuasion as well as many other related areas. Social psychologists may be interested in understanding emotion, educational reform, or training and employment issues. Consequently, social psychologists are found almost everywhere in the workforce. Most are in academia. Some are an integral part of corporate America, informing marketing and advertising fields, and structuring employment settings. Social psychologists play an important role in education policy and methods of instruction. The work of social psychologists also influences legal and political contexts. Their work usually involves highly controlled experiments with careful manipulations of study variables, making social psychologists highly valued methodologists as well.

Read the table of contents in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (http://psycnet.apa.org/index.cfm?fa=browsePA.volumes&jcode=psp) to learn more about this subdiscipline. Also, see www.socialpsychology.org for more information on the field.

Quantitative Psychology

What is a quantitative psychologist? If you are interested in statistics, quantitative psychology is for you. As research hypotheses grow increasingly sophisticated, and research designs involve greater volumes of data, across multiple modes of observation, time points, or from multiple informants, new quantitative procedures are needed. Quantitative psychologists develop these new statistical approaches and help to apply existing statistical approaches to innovative problems. Many quantitative psychologists have their own substantive area of interest—a topic that they study of specific interest to them. In addition to their work exploring these specific hypotheses, quantitative psychologists also design simulations and procedures that can be used more broadly and help set the standard for how all other psychologists can test their hypotheses. There is a great need for quantitative psychologists in the field of psychology, as well as in many other disciplines who are often eager to hire quantitative psychologists in the corporate world, private industry, or government. As compared to the number of career opportunities available for quantitative psychologists, there are relatively few applicants pursuing this area of graduate study.

Read the table of contents in the *Psychological Methods* (http://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/met/index.aspx) to learn more about this subdiscipline. Also, see APA Division 5 (http://www.apa.org/divisions/div5/).

Cognitive Psychology

What is a cognitive psychologist? Cognitive psychology is a field that addresses learning, perception, memory, language, and other areas of cognitive processing (e.g., organizing information, consolidating information from the senses). Cognitive psychologists often conduct highly controlled experiments to identify how cognitive functions are developed, maintained, and may atrophy as individuals become older or sustain traumatic injuries. Recently, work in cognitive psychology has become more integrated with work in neuroscience, allowing for more in depth exploration of specific brain structures or processes that are implicated in specific cognitive tasks. Read the table of contents in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology* (http://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/xlm/index.aspx) or Cognitive Psychology (http://www.journals.elsevier.com/cognitive-psychology/) to learn more about this subdiscipline. Also, see the Psychonomic Society (http://www.psychonomic.org/) or Cognitive Neuroscience Society (http://www.cogneurosociety.org/) for more information.

Behavioral Neuroscience

What is a behavioral neuroscientist? Of course, most behavior can be explained by specific brain structures and neurological processes occurring within the brain. Often using animal models to study brain structures and functions, behavioral neuroscientists study behavior at the cellular level! Using controlled experiments, it is possible to understand many different types of behaviors (e.g., how drugs affect the brain, how individual learning, memory, and perception works, what biological substrates are associated with emotion, etc.). Recent work in behavioral neuroscience also takes advantage of imaging technology (e.g., fMRI) to advance this field. Behavioral neuroscience is a terrific area to become a part of—there is an opportunity for substantial integration with related fields, such as chemistry, biology, pharmacology, and psychiatry.

Read the table of contents in the *Journal of Neuroscience* (http://www.jneurosci.org/) or *Behavioral Neuroscience* (http://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/bne/index.aspx) to learn more about this subdiscipline. Also, see the Society for Neuroscience (www.sfn.org) for more information.

Deciding Where to Apply

Hopefully, you have begun to gain some insight into the type of career you may wish to pursue, and you have considered various possible graduate programs that may be right for you. You may be wondering whether you can apply to more than one type of graduate program.

In short: Yes. Application to different types of graduate programs is somewhat frequent. For example, because admission rates are extremely low for clinical psychology Ph.D. programs, if this type of program is your first choice, it may be a good idea to apply to other types of programs in addition to clinical psychology. For example, you may want to do this if a clinical psychology Ph.D. program is your first choice but your grades and scores are "borderline" according to the admission statistics posted on program websites or if you are not sure your research background is strong enough.

Another reason to do this might be that you have a specific research interest that fits into different types of programs. For example, a student who is interested in health risk behaviors among adolescents could consider programs in clinical child psychology, pediatric psychology, or developmental psychology (or public health).

If you are applying to different types of programs because you are still unsure of what your interests and/or career goals are, you may want to wait a year before launching into the graduate school application process. The process will be much more overwhelming if you begin it unsure of how much you are actually interested in attending the programs you are applying to. You should not apply until you have a sense of whether you are most interested in research or clinical work or both, until you have an idea of the research areas that interest you most, and until you are so excited about the programs you are applying to that you cannot *wait* for the spring to arrive so you can interview and choose a program!

Prior to Applying to Doctoral Ph.D. Programs in Psychology

This next section offers an overview of common issues to consider prior to applying to doctoral Ph.D. programs in psychology.

When to Apply

Some applicants apply to graduate school during their senior year in college. An increasing number of applicants wait for 1–3 years, during which they work as a postbaccalaureate research assistant or in a related position. Neither of these options in itself is likely to determine the outcome of your applications; however, obtaining a "postbacc" position may help you gain needed experience. Apart from CV building, the decision to take time away from school may be a personal decision based on your readiness. Some pros/cons are listed below (also see Chap. 1).

Taking Time Away from School: Pros

- Being a graduate student is a very different experience from being an undergraduate student, and for many people it can be difficult to make this transition with only a summer in between. Graduate school in psychology is not about studying well for tests and maintaining a high GPA. In a doctoral program, you will be working with professors as colleagues. You will likely be responsible for organizing and running large projects. You will be expected to balance these duties with your coursework. You will be expected to actively participate in most of your classes, some of which may have only a handful of students. If you are entering a clinical, counseling, or school psychology program, you will likely begin conducting assessments and/or therapy with real clients very early in your graduate training (possibly within the first year).
- It can be challenging to apply to graduate school while balancing college coursework and perhaps a senior honors thesis. Applying once out of school (especially if working a "9 to 5" job) may allow an applicant more time to complete applications.
- Working in a psychology lab after college may be necessary for admission to a top clinical psychology program if you received little research training as an undergrad.
- Working in a psychology lab or a related organization after college can help you refine your research interests, figure out what you want to study in graduate school, and figure out which type of graduate program might be best for you.
- Applying to graduate programs after completing all undergraduate coursework and projects allows applicants to discuss their completed undergraduate honors thesis (if applicable) during the application process (e.g., in personal statements and during interviews).
- Working a fulltime job before graduate school may allow applicants to save up money that can be very helpful to have as grad students!
- It is not a good idea to enter graduate school immediately following college "just to get it done." In the larger scheme of your life, it probably will not matter if you get your doctoral degree at age 26 or 28, and you will probably not be a happy graduate student if you try to push through graduate school for 4–7 years with the goal of just *finishing*. Graduate school can be a wonderful experience when you are ready for it, but it is definitely a lot of work and a big adjustment. Many current graduate students report that they are happy they took a year or 2 off in between college and graduate school, because they entered graduate school ready and excited for what lay ahead of them.

Taking Time Away from School: Cons

- Some people do not want to lose momentum: They are ready to begin graduate school and have no interest in taking time off in between.
- Trying to find a psychology-related job for the year or 2 in between college and graduate school may be challenging and stressful.
- If you apply to graduate school while still in college, you will be able to consult professors and graduate students in person as you decide which schools to apply to, work on your personal statements, and complete your applications.
- If you apply to graduate school while still in college, you will be able to distribute materials for letters of recommendation in person, pick up transcripts in person, perhaps visit your college's Writing Center for help with your personal statement, and have access to all the resources a college campus offers.
- It is easier to defer student loans if you remain a full-time student without a break in between.
- If you go straight through from college to graduate school, you will finish grad school earlier; if you graduate from college at age 22, you could have your Ph.D. by age 27. This is very appealing to many people.

Obtaining Research Experience

Perhaps the single most important thing you can do to improve your chances of graduate school

admission is to obtain research experience. However, note that research experiences can vary considerably. As an undergraduate student, you may have opportunities to become involved in a faculty member's lab and to engage in a variety of possible tasks. It is quite common for undergraduate students to assist with data entry, library research, data coding, data collection—perhaps involving interactions with research participants, or other tasks that may be specific to the type of research you are interested in (e.g., computer programming, creation of study materials or stimuli, statistical analysis).

What is the best research experience to get? No single type of research experience is necessarily better than another (although some are admittedly tedious, perhaps). More important is that your research experience helps you to accomplish three goals. First, it is important for you to become exposed to the research process to determine whether you enjoy this type of work. You will undoubtedly observe that research is very time consuming, detail-oriented, meticulous endeavor that may take months or even years before achieving results. Research also can be remarkably invigorating, allowing you to examine ideas that are important to you, rigorously test these ideas, and then disseminate your results to the international community of psychologists through conferences or manuscripts! Research is not for everyone, and this exposure may help you to learn whether this is an activity that you want to become thoroughly involved in for many years to come. If you do not find that you have a passion for at least one aspect of the research process, it may be challenging to retain the stamina needed to successfully complete independent research projects as a graduate student.

A second goal of your research experience is to learn about the type of research questions that interest you the most. Assistance on a study related to adolescent girls' depression may help you to learn that you enjoy, or do not enjoy, working with adolescents, examining gender-related issues, or studying internalizing disorders, for instance. Your work on a project examining therapy process variables that increase the efficacy of behavioral treatment of externalizing symptoms may help you appreciate applied research questions, or increase your desire to study precursors that predict the onset of oppositional behaviors. Importantly, when you apply to graduate programs, it will be necessary for you to have some focus regarding the type of research you would like to conduct.

Third, and perhaps most important, it is essential that your research experience allow you to become educated regarding the scientific questions under investigation. Too many undergraduate students gain research experience that helps to develop specific skills (which is certainly very important!), but not a broader understanding of what the research is about or why it is being conducted.

Offering a scientific contribution to the research project can be difficult and intimidating, however. Some students feel reluctant to offer ideas and input during lab meetings that include mostly graduate students, postdocs, and faculty members. It also may feel somewhat challenging to schedule an individual meeting with your faculty mentor to discuss your ideas. We strongly recommend that you attempt to do so, however, to get the most out of your research experience. A good start is to request some articles that will help you to read a bit about the area under investigation. Then, it is worth spending a few hours on PsycInfo looking for related articles that help you to understand how multiple investigators have thought about the issue you are studying. Then try asking some questions, or offering some opinions and thoughts during a lab discussion. Your ideas do not need to be revolutionary; they should simply help you to understand more of what is going on and indicate your interest and curiosity. For instance, you may want to know: "Why are we measuring variable X this way?" "Is this related to theory Y that is discussed in this article I read?" "I wonder if examining Z would help us to understand the issue better."

Your research experience should help you to "think like a scientist," and even if you are simply entering data, you might be able to observe something that allows you to develop a question about the nature of whatever it is that you are studying (e.g., "Everyone responds with a '1' to this item;

perhaps we are not assessing this well"). Incidentally, demonstrating this ability to your faculty supervisors also will help them write you a letter of recommendation when you apply to graduate school.

As we have discussed, admission to psychology Ph.D. programs is quite competitive. Successful applicants now typically have amassed considerable research experience before applying to doctoral programs. In addition to work in a research lab as a volunteer, or for a semester of course credit, other options include the completion of an honors thesis, or taking a full-time research assistant position for 1–2 years following the completion of the undergraduate degree. The honors thesis is a particularly excellent opportunity to gain research experience; the thesis helps you to develop and demonstrate independent research skills by developing and testing your own hypothesis. The thesis also helps you to gain substantial exposure to a faculty member who can provide mentorship on your thesis and later write you a letter of recommendation. A full-time research assistant position also can be a terrific opportunity. In this role, you will develop advanced knowledge and skill in the detailed procedures required to conduct an investigation, to work closely with a faculty member, and often to supervise undergraduate research volunteers. While neither the honors thesis nor the research assistant position is *required* for entry into graduate school, a remarkably high proportion of successful applicants to top Ph.D. programs do have one or both of these experiences.

Obtaining Clinical Experience

Many students ask whether they need to obtain clinical experience to gain entry into doctoral Ph.D. programs in clinical, counseling, or school psychology. In our opinion, the short answer is, "No."

Clinical experience allows you to gain exposure to populations who are experiencing psychological symptoms. For this reason, it can be a good experience, and perhaps one that you should have before embarking on a clinical career. This experience also will help you learn to develop rapport with individuals of different ages and in different settings. Some clinical experiences occur in excellent treatment facilities (or in treatment/research summer camps for youth with psychopathology), and these particularly can be excellent experiences.

However, since your role during this clinical placement will not be that of a true clinician, the skills you develop are not necessarily going to increase the attractiveness of your application significantly. In other words, you will learn all you need to know about clinical work during graduate school, so these experiences are not needed to demonstrate any specific expertise. If you believe this experience will help you determine your interests and career choice, then it is a terrific idea. If you have already decided to apply to clinical Ph.D. programs, and you have a choice between a research and clinical experience, then choose research, research, research. For counseling or school psychology programs, research experience may be less essential.

Applying to Doctoral Ph.D. Programs in Psychology

Table 2.3 offers a sample timeline to help accomplish the many tasks that are required when applying to doctoral programs in psychology. This section offers a few considerations for several of these steps.

Selecting Potential Schools and Mentors

For most graduate programs in psychology, you will be working with a primary research advisor, becoming immersed in various projects in his/her lab. In most cases, the match between you and your advisor is even more important than the characteristics of the overall program. It is important that this person's research *thrills you*, because you will be working with him/her on that research for 4–6 years! Keep in mind that if you do not have research experience in a potential advisor's area of

Table 2.3 Monthly tasks for successfully managing the graduate school application process

Prior to August of the year you are applying (as early as possible to reduce stress during the fall months)
• Obtain research experience
• Choose type(s) of programs to apply to
• Study for and take the General GRE
Send score reports to schools you are most interested in at this point
Keep track of which schools are sent these scores; as score reports are sent following each test, some schools may not receive both your General and Psychology scores, so it will be necessary to send another score report after you have taken both tests
• (If necessary) Study for and take the Psychology GRE
Send score reports to schools you are most interested in at this point
Keep track of which schools are sent these scores (see above)
August
• Research schools and advisors (begin Excel spreadsheet to organize)
• Read sample personal statements
• Create a draft of your CV
Ask for comments from mentors, Career Center, etc.
September
• If not listed on their website, contact potential advisors to see if they will be taking students
• Finalize list of schools to apply to
• Create an organizational system for applications using Excel
Obtain and file paper copies of all application materials for reference
• Ask professors to write your letters of recommendation
Include a copy of CV, list of schools, and deadlines
Ask for their preferences (e.g., whether they want to submit materials online or through the mail; when they would like to receive reminder emails)
If sending paper rather than online letters, provide recommenders with prestamped, pre-addressed envelopes, and be sure it is clear which envelope goes with which school
• Brainstorm and write first draft of personal statement
October
• Ask for comments from mentors, Career Center, etc. on personal statement draft
• Order remaining GRE score reports
• Order transcripts
• Write drafts of supplemental essays
Ask for comments from mentors, Career Center, etc.
• Begin filling out application forms online
November
• Final draft of personal statement and supplemental essays
• Complete application forms for all Dec. 1 deadline schools
If mailing forms, make sure to mail several weeks in advance
Check to make sure all materials have been received
• Check with recommenders about letters
• Last chance to take the Psychology GRE
Order remaining GRE score reports
December
• Complete application forms for remaining schools (if mailing forms, make sure to mail several weeks in advance)
Check to make sure all materials have been received
• Thank everyone who helped you with the application process
• Breathe a sigh of relief and enjoy the holidays!

(continued)

Table 2.3 (continued)

January, February, March
• Receive interview offers (phone interviews and official visits)
• Prepare for interviews:
Look up work by potential advisors
Make lists of questions for potential advisors and current graduate students
• Go to interviews:
Dress professionally
Ask lots of questions
Be gracious towards everyone you meet
February, March, April
• Thank people who interviewed you and reiterate your interest in the program
• Hear back from schools after interviews
If multiple offers, narrow down as quickly as possible
April
• Make your decision!

expertise, you will need to be able to explain clearly in your personal statement how your interests have led you to apply to work with this person and why you think you are a good match for the lab.

This reflects a general issue related to your decisions on how to select graduate programs. You probably are already aware that at the next stage of your career, your graduate school experience will be evaluated not simply based on the reputation of your Ph.D. program but also on the reputation of your mentor and your productivity with that mentor during graduate school. This is different than the undergraduate application experience which can be discussed in terms of various ranking systems of university reputations (e.g., US News and World Report). Remember, rankings are not generally considered to be very reliable for Ph.D. psychology programs (at best, one might use existing graduate ranking systems to identify programs in the top quartile, second quartile, etc., but rankings more specific than that are somewhat arbitrary). Ph.D. programs in clinical psychology sometimes are located within universities with excellent reputations for undergraduate training but sometimes not. Similarly, the best possible mentor to study a particular area of research sometimes will be located at a graduate program generally regarded to be of high quality but sometimes not. Thus, your application decisions may reflect an interest in a program, a mentor, or both. Your personal statement should reflect these interests.

You can learn a lot about a potential advisor through online searches. Here are some specific things to look for while deciding whether to apply to work with a psychology professor:

- How many publications does he/she have? If there are many, then it may be more likely that you will have an opportunity to earn authorship on many publications during your time in graduate school.
- Are the publications in good journals? (You can ask a graduate student or professor for help in determining this). Both quantity and quality of publications will be important when people evaluate your research productivity later in your career.
- Are the graduate students in this person's lab also authors on the publications?
- Is this person an assistant, associate, or full professor? People differ in their opinions about whether it is better to work with a young professor or a tenured professor. Assistant professors need to produce high-quality research and high-quality publications in order to get tenure, which will likely have benefits for their graduate students' productivity and CVs. On the other hand, assistant professors are less likely to have job stability and connections in the field than tenured professors, and they may have less energy to focus on their

graduate students' careers, as compared to tenured professors who are no longer struggling to build their own careers and reputations. However, yet another factor to consider is that very senior faculty members may not be as actively involved in new research projects as professors earlier in their careers.

When creating your school list, we recommend that you place the greatest weight on the research match between you and your potential advisor and on the general sense you get of the quality of the person's research, their reputation, and (for newer professors) their potential. When considering the research match between you and a potential advisor, you can learn a great deal about their research interests by searching for their journal articles on PsycInfo or Google Scholar. However, it is also important to try to figure out what potential advisors are *currently* studying, because often several years will elapse between when someone conducts research and when a journal article with the results is published. The professor's current research interests and projects may appear on their website, or you can email them to express your interest in their work and to ask what they are currently studying (we will discuss later whether and when to email potential advisors).

In addition to your specific advisor, the strength of the overall program is also extremely important. Characteristics to consider in choosing a program are its reputation in the field (your undergraduate psychology advisor or another psychology faculty member is probably the best person to talk to about this; as discussed previously, program rankings only provide a vague idea of training quality), the strength of the research training, and (if applicable) the strength of the clinical training.

To find specific schools and advisors, you can try the following search methods:

- You can ask psychology faculty members at your undergraduate college who the best researchers are in the areas you are interested in.
- You can do PsycInfo searches for your areas of interest, then search for the article authors to see where they teach and the types of programs they are affiliated with (e.g., clinical, developmental).
- Although specific rankings of graduate programs should be interpreted cautiously, they can give you a broad idea of which "quartile" a program likely belongs to. You can use the US News and World Report rankings as a jumping off point for finding programs you might want to apply to. (Note that clinical psychology is listed under the Health programs category, while other psychology Ph.D. programs are listed under Psychology.) Also, check www.socialpsychology.org for other program ranking lists. These ranking lists contain links to the schools' program websites, and you can follow these links to read about the programs and to review their faculty members. On most program websites, you can see brief summaries of faculty members' research interests, and many websites include links to faculty members' own webpages.

If you are looking at clinical psychology Ph.D. programs, pay attention to the program statistics posted on their websites. All APA-accredited psychology doctoral programs (i.e., clinical, counseling, and school psychology only) are required to report statistics such as average GRE scores and GPAs, acceptance rates, and average time it takes students to get through the program. Be wary of programs that do not have a high completion rate; it may be a bad sign if many students are not finishing the program. Also, a less understood but very informative statistic is the match rate—the percentage of students who were placed in one of their top-choice internship sites after completing their coursework and dissertation. Most top quality programs have average match rates (across 5 years) of at least 75%.

The General GRE

GRE scores are used as an important marker of potential success in graduate school. As with GPA, the higher the score the better. The General exam is quite similar to the SAT, and students on average score a bit higher on the GRE as compared to the SAT (thanks to a quality undergraduate education!).

Percentile scores are often evaluated more closely than the standardized scores. The program websites mentioned above include data regarding the averages and ranges of GRE scores for admitted students. Also, APA offers a book with information on every program, as well as data regarding admission criteria, called *Graduate Study in Psychology*. In practice, we believe most all students' verbal and quantitative scores each exceed the 75th percentile; however, *significant deviation* in these scores is allowed when considering cultural and language limitations of the GRE. The more competitive the program (i.e., the smaller the ratio between accepted applicants and total applications), the higher the GRE score that is needed to gain admission.

Many suggest that it is best to take the GRE the summer before you apply, if at all possible. The General GRE can be taken virtually any day of the year, but it is necessary to sign up months in advance in most cases because spots fill up. Some advantages of doing so include:

- Time to take the test again if you do poorly (all of your scores will be sent to the schools, not just your best scores, but many schools will only be interested in your best scores).
- You will know what your scores are when creating your school list. As previously mentioned, all APA-accredited psychology doctoral programs are required to publish their students' average GRE scores and GPAs online, so if you are interested in these areas of psychology, this can help you assess where you stand relative to students who were accepted.
- You can make sure your schools get your scores in time.

The Psychology GRE

The Psychology GRE used to be relatively unimportant to most doctoral programs in psychology. However, this may be changing as the Psychology GRE may be used to help fulfill competencies required within the doctoral training sequence for clinical, counseling, and school psychology programs. In addition, a minority of doctoral programs place very high priority on the psychology GRE during the admissions process.

The psychology GRE is very different from the General GRE. The psychology GRE straightforwardly assesses your knowledge of the subfields of psychology. There are fewer strategies and "tricks" you can learn for this test; you simply have to learn the material. If you are a psychology major, you likely will already have learned most of the relevant material but will need to re-familiarize yourself with it, and there may be areas of psychology to which you have had less exposure. If you were *not* a psychology major, you will have to learn more new material. Also, if you were not a psychology major, your score on this test will be more important than for psychology majors; for non-psychology majors, the score demonstrates to admission committees whether you have the appropriate background knowledge that psychology majors should have learned during college.

The Psychology GRE is only offered on a few specific days per year, and you should be sure to sign up as far in advance as possible to be sure to get a spot at a convenient test center. If you can, take the test in April of the year when you will be applying. Applicants who take both the General and Psychology GRE during the fall months when they also are working on applications (i.e., September, October, November, December) will likely find the application process far more stressful.

Contacting Potential Mentors

With the advent of email, students more commonly began to write potential mentors to inquire whether applicants would be accepted in the lab this year and/or to generally express an interest in the graduate program. This is a terrific idea, and many mentors will be very appreciative of such emails.

However, it is important to remember that some mentors may receive a large number of emails from applicants during high peak months of the application process. Therefore, it is important to be patient and forgiving when waiting for a response from faculty. It also is often a good

idea to carefully review information available on the program and the faculty member's websites, as answers to some of your questions may be available online. Most faculty will be happy to answer your questions and correspond when possible. Be aware, however, that such correspondence is certainly not necessary and often plays little to no role in your admissions outcome.

If you do email professors, make sure your emails are professional, are not overly wordy, contain no typos, and do not include questions that are answered on the program's website.

If you email a professor to ask if he/she is taking students because the info is not on the website, and if he/she does not respond, you can contact the program administrative assistant or you can go ahead and apply. Some faculty members do not know if they will accept students until later in the year; they may be waiting to hear about funding, or they may want to see the applicant pool before deciding whether or not they want to interview people.

Keep in mind when you write to and/or talk on the phone with program administrative assistants that they often play a *huge* role in the application process. In some programs, it is the administrative assistant who first reviews all applications and decides which ones will be passed on to faculty. If you are rude or condescending in your email or phone contact with an administrative assistant, the director of the program will probably hear about it.

Letters of Recommendation

Most schools ask for three letters of recommendation. At least two should be from people with doctoral degrees in psychology. The people whom you ask to write your letters should know you well as a student. At least one of your letter writers should be able to comment on your research skills and experiences as well. It sometimes may make sense to include four letters, but please keep in mind that doing so requires more reading for bleary-eyed application reviewers, and an extra letter does not gain you any extra credit.

Letters of recommendation are extremely important, so choose your recommenders wisely. These letters are the tools potential mentors will use to decide whether you would be a good person to have in the lab for 4–6 years; this is not trivial decision. A bad or even a lukewarm letter of recommendation can definitely ruin your chances of admission. Potential advisors will not be impressed by letters that offer "faint praise"; your letters should come from people who know you very well and who will be able to offer very detailed and enthusiastic comments and praise about your strengths as a student, research assistant, and lab member.

It is a good idea to send your letter writers the full list of schools to which you are applying as soon as it is finalized. Depending on your relationship with each letter writer and how organized they seem, it may be a good idea to send reminders about upcoming deadlines as they approach (but refrain from send an annoying number of reminders!). It also may be helpful to give each of your letter writers a copy of your Curriculum Vitae (CV) or résumé, depending on how well they know you.

No matter how or when you are asking someone to write you a letter of recommendation, remember that they are doing you a big favor. Your goal should be to make your letter writers' job as smooth and easy as possible. Make sure to ask exactly how they would like you to send them the materials. Many professors are willing to submit recommendation materials online (and many programs now highly encourage or even require this), but some professors prefer to submit the materials offline (i.e., printing the letters and sending them through the mail). From your perspective, it will be much easier and simpler if your letter writers submit their materials online, but you should respect their preferences, unless you are applying to a program that *requires* that materials be submitted online.

The Personal Statement

The vast majority of personal statements follow an identical format. First, a brief anecdote is

offered describing a watershed moment in which the applicant fully realized their interest in psychology. Next, a brief section describes the applicants' enthusiasm for one or more psychology undergraduate courses. Research experiences then are described in succession. For each experience, the title and principal investigator of the project are listed, followed by a list of the applicant's responsibilities and tasks on the project. The statement often ends with a brief paragraph describing research interests, career interests, admiration of the graduate program, and perhaps the name of a specific potential mentor or two.

This type of personal statement is fine. It accomplishes many of the main objectives that the personal statement is meant to serve. It indeed is important to clearly state research experiences, to express enthusiasm for and a match to a specific aspect of the graduate program, and to articulate clear research and career goals. It also often is a good idea to identify a potential mentor.

Yet, this type of statement is not quite as effective as it may be, in part because so very many statements appear to be remarkably similar to one another. We believe that the statements that truly distinguish themselves are those that demonstrate evidence of the potential to become an independent investigator. As a graduate student, you will be expected to progressively develop research skills that will establish you as an independent scholar. To the extent that it is possible to convey this within the personal statement, you may be able to make your potential to excel as a graduate student very clear to the reader.

Listing research experiences, principal investigators, and project responsibilities can accomplish an important goal. Often, your experiences will reflect exposure to a project with goals that are particularly relevant to the potential mentor's own research, a large, impressive project, or an undergraduate mentor who is known for producing excellent training experience among their students. This can indeed be very helpful to your application in that it expresses a great foundation on which to build during graduate training. If your potential graduate mentor is familiar with your undergraduate mentor's work and reputation, you may benefit from positive assumptions and attributions made about you and your undergraduate work.

Conveying an accounting of your various responsibilities on research projects also can be useful to help describe your readiness to assist in ongoing projects in your graduate mentor's lab. You may even possess a particular skill that is lacking and needed in the lab; thus, you will be a particularly strong asset to your new environment.

Graduate mentors may differ in their selection criteria. Many are extremely excited to have an enthusiastic and experienced applicant join the lab. Others may be mostly concerned with your academic ability and interest in their research, knowing that they can train you to complete whatever tasks are needed in their lab. However, all graduate mentors likely are invested also in seeing you succeed as an independent scholar. Thus, we believe an applicant "can't go wrong" by going a step beyond this common format and clearly conveying an aptitude for independent research.

Perhaps more important than a list of prior research experiences and responsibilities is a brief description of *what you learned* from each of these research experiences. What was the project about? What were the hypotheses that interested you the most? Are you familiar with any of the literature that is related to the research project? How did your experience in this research project help shape your interests?

In other words, the personal statement should not simply restate your CV or résumé, but rather should help the admissions committee understand what is "between the lines" of your CV/résumé. A description of your responsibilities might indicate that you "coded and entered data using SPSS on a project examining autism." But in addition to this information, you might also indicate that "the project was designed to examine the efficacy of IBT treatment," and that you were "particularly excited by the opportunity to examine different treatment approaches in an applied research setting," or that you "observed that children's intellectual ability notably changed the presentation of PDD symptoms," leading to your "strong interest in studying Asperger's disorder."

As you can see, the inclusion of these statements is perhaps somewhat subtle. However, we believe it can be quite helpful for the admissions committee to "see how you think," understand the motivations behind your research interests, and also help convey your knowledge of the literature or theories involved in your past work. The applicants who do this successfully have personal statements that appear qualitatively different and often are more successful.

Should I Mention a Specific Mentor?

Short answer: Yes. But keep in mind that programs vary considerably on how graduate students are selected. Some programs allow each faculty member to make unilateral decisions regarding graduate admissions. Thus, your application is really meant to convince a single person to admit you, and your potential match with that person will be evaluated directly. Other programs make group-based decisions to varying degrees. It still may be important to express a match to a specific mentor, but your general match with the program, and perhaps with other potential mentors, also will be evaluated.

When listing the name of a specific potential mentor, this statement should be accompanied by a discussion of why you want to work with this professor, what you specifically hope to study with this person in graduate school, and how your background and interests make you a great match for this person's lab. Some professors will do a search for applications that contain their name and then read those personal statements. It can also be a good idea to name a second professor whose research interests you, but if that person studies something completely different from the first person you mentioned, this will suggest that you have not focused your research interests. For example, if you say you are interested in the research of a professor who studies adult anxiety disorders, and at the end of the essay you state that you are also interested in the work of a professor who studies childhood externalizing disorders, these two professors might question your commitment to their specific areas of research. You want to convince the person reading your essay that he/she is the best match for your research interests and that you are the applicant who can offer the best contributions to his/her lab. To do this successfully, it is important to create a clear picture of how your interests developed. Many people make the mistake in these essays of talking about their general interest in psychology, then their coursework, then their lab work, then their specific research interests, in discrete paragraphs with no clear "arc" showing how all these experiences are linked.

Some applicants apply to work with a professor whose research interests are quite different from those the applicant has studied in the past. For example, perhaps you are interested in studying ADHD in grad school, but as an undergrad you studied substance use. If this is the case, your job in the personal statement is to clearly explain why you would nevertheless be a good match for this lab. The person reading your personal statement may be reading essays from dozens of other applicants who have worked for 2 or more years in an ADHD lab, so you will need to convince this professor that there are other excellent reasons to offer you an interview. Think about the aspects of your training that have prepared you for research in ADHD and that have more broadly prepared you for success as a graduate student. Put yourself in the shoes of the potential future advisor reading dozens of essays, and then critically read your own essay from the perspective of this specific professor, asking yourself: *Would I want to offer this applicant an interview*?

After Applications Are Submitted

How the Admissions Process Works

Admission into psychology doctoral Ph.D. programs is highly competitive. Admission to clinical programs is perhaps more competitive than any other type of graduate program, including law, medicine, etc. For many clinical programs, approximately 2–5% of applicants (often about 3–8 out of 150–350) are admitted. Every graduate program in psychology differs in their evaluation and admission procedures, but most all programs use some type of multiple hurdle system

that evaluates applicants in several stages based on different sets of criteria. These hurdles and criteria are discussed below.

Educational Background

Typically, the evaluation of applications begins with a review of basic educational credentials. Sometimes this stage of the evaluation process is conducted by the university's graduate school, or an administrative assistant, rather than a psychology faculty member. Thus, the review is fairly brief, blunt, and admittedly imperfect. Factors evaluated include the quality of the undergraduate institution, the undergraduate GPA, and the GRE scores.

At this stage, you likely already have selected, and perhaps are close to graduating from, your undergraduate institution. There is little you can do to change that now.

Which GPA? Students often ask whether their overall GPA or their psychology (major) GPA will be evaluated. In our experience, the overall GPA is given far more weight than the psychology GPA. In many cases, however, undergraduate students began school with hopes of pursuing a premed curriculum, then, after several low grades, switch career aspirations. In such cases, an applicant's overall GPA may suffer from these few low grades. In this situation (particularly if this has been noted somewhere in the application; most appropriately by a professor writing a letter of recommendation), the evaluator may briefly glance at the transcript to see if a single outlier grade or two is contributing to a low overall GPA. To be frank, however, we believe that even in this situation evaluators will focus only on the overall cumulative GPA. For clinical Ph.D. programs, it is extremely rare for students to be admitted with a GPA below 3.0. The vast majority of admitted students have a GPA above 3.4 or 3.5. As noted above, you can visit the website of almost any accredited clinical, counseling, or school psychology program to obtain GPA averages and ranges from the last few classes of admitted students (look for links that indicate "performance and outcome data"). A link to data for all programs in clinical psychology can be found on the website of the CUDCP: http://cudcp.us/address/univlinks.php. These data are not available for other types of doctoral programs in psychology.

Students sometimes ask whether specific undergraduate courses might increase or decrease the likelihood of admission. In reality, transcripts are infrequently scrutinized, particularly for psychology majors. Because the psychology major typically includes a similar set of classes in most all undergraduate institutions (e.g., research methods, statistics), it often seems unnecessary to examine the course choices of every applicant. You will not get into graduate school simply because you took 1–2 advanced or difficult courses, and you will not be denied admission simply because you took Advanced Basket weaving as an elective.

What if I didn't major in psychology? The vast majority of admitted students have majored in psychology. But a significant minority have not. Applicants who have not majored in psychology likely need to have even more research experience to demonstrate a familiarity with the field. The Psychology GRE score also may be more heavily weighted for these applicants.

General Match to Program Values and Training Experiences

Students who make it past the first hurdle of application evaluation (anywhere between 20 and 50% of applicants do) next are evaluated to determine a general match to the overall program values and possible training experiences. There are three main reasons why an application would not make it past this hurdle:

(A) The students' career interests simply do not reflect the values of the program. Perhaps most commonly, an applicant applies to a program that emphasizes research training, yet expresses no interest in research and/or has no research experience. Or, conversely, it may be that a student with an exclusive interest in research applies to a clinical program that emphasizes clinical training. Or, a student may express an interest in a specific theoretical orientation that is not emphasized by the graduate program.

(B) The student expresses an interest in an activity (e.g., studying schizophrenia) that simply is

unavailable. This may be for one of four common reasons:

1. First, it may be that this training experience never has been offered in the program, and the application appears to have been submitted merely due to the reputation or location of the program.
2. Second, it may be that the activity was directed by a faculty member who has since retired or left the university. It is essential that you check the website regularly for each program to which you apply.
3. Third, it may be that the faculty member providing this activity is still in residence, but will not be accepting a student this year.
4. Fourth, the faculty member is in residence and accepting students, but has changed research interests recently.

Regarding points (3) and (4) above, please see information above regarding suggested strategies for contacting potential faculty mentors before the application process.

(C) The application contains information that is widely inappropriate and unprofessional. Applicants who disclose their own psychopathology, for example, are often "screened out" at this stage.

Specific Match to a Mentor and Research Program

At this stage during the admissions process, each faculty mentor who is accepting students usually offers input regarding 5–20 applicants who have excellent educational credentials and are a general match to the program. At some programs this is referred to as the "short list." This stage of the admissions procedure becomes remarkably difficult for the faculty member and/or admissions committee. Quite frankly, there are many extremely well-qualified applicants, and by this stage of the process, it often is apparent that any one of the short list members would do quite well in graduate school. Similarly, many faculty feel that they would likely be happy with any of these highly talented applicants.

Yet, decisions nevertheless need to be made, and the types of factors that go into admission decisions at this point can be inconsistent or even unpredictable. In other words, students who make it to the short list and then the interviewing stage should not feel personally offended if later denied admission. This is truly a difficult process.

Despite some of the idiosyncrasies and serendipity involved in this stage of the process, there are some clear factors that still can make a difference in your fate, including the personal statement described in the previous section and the interview, described below.

The Interview

Waiting to receive interview offers from schools can be a very stressful, anxious time for applicants. Interview offers may come by email or phone. For clinical psychology, they may come in early January or mid-February or anytime in between. In some rare cases they might arrive earlier or later. They might come at any time of day. In some doctoral psychology programs, an invitation for a campus visit means that you have been accepted, and the visit will be a chance to recruit you. In others, including almost all Ph.D. programs in clinical psychology, the interview occurs before final admission decisions have been made.

Note that it is becoming increasingly common for professors to have phone interviews with their top applicants prior to offering invitations for in-person interviews. Sometimes professors who want to conduct phone interviews will email their applicants in advance to schedule a phone date. However, other professors may call you unexpectedly to have a spontaneous phone interview.

At most universities that conduct in-person interviews prior to admission decisions, about 3–6 applicants are invited for an interview for every one admissions slot available. Suddenly, the odds are looking much better for you! The 100–600 applications received by some doctoral level psychology graduate programs have been narrowed to just a few dozen, and for the lab you are most interested in, just a small handful of applicants will be coming for an interview. However, referring to this next stage of the

process as an "interview" incorrectly portrays the experience as a process in which faculty are exclusively selecting students. In reality, a large proportion of interview-invited applicants have more than one site to visit, which means that students are evaluating and selecting programs as much as vice versa. You have a lot of "power" in this situation, and you will need to gather a lot of information to make one of the most important professional decisions of your life.

Scheduling the Interviews

One of the first questions that arises when applicants begin hearing about interviews pertains to inevitable dilemmas in scheduling. Most interviews occur in the months of January, February, and March. With just a few possible weekends to organize a day for applicant interviews, it is quite likely that you will experience a scheduling conflict between two schools that have extended invitations. Sadly, there is no easy solution to this dilemma. Some schools may offer multiple dates for you to visit, others will not. Sometimes you can arrange your own informal visit on a date that is convenient for you; however, the depth of information and number of people who will meet you likely will be reduced as compared to the experience you would have on the formal "Interview Day." In some cases, you may learn of an impending conflict between a site that has offered you an interview and another site that has not yet, but might soon extend an invitation for the same date. It is perfectly appropriate to call a site and ask when their interview dates may be, but of course, do not assume that you will be getting an interview, and be sure not to sound presumptuous in your request for info.

When dealing with such scheduling conflicts, please be extremely sensitive to the difficulties involved for the program in coordinating a large interview day for its applicants. A tremendous amount of planning and expense is dedicated to these days; be sure to request exceptions only with great care and consideration for how much work is involved among your hosts. Also, if wrestling with a scheduling conflict, make sure your communication with a program clearly expresses your interest level in the site accurately. If you must cancel, rearrange, or decline an interview invitation, be sure that the faculty understand whether this is a reflection of your interest in their program. In other words, let them know you remain interested and this was an unavoidable consequence of your busy travel schedule (if that is true).

Thanks to modern technology, sometimes it is possible to be at two places at once. For instance, if you request early morning interviews at one site, you may be able to schedule late afternoon interviews at another by Skype or phone. Although this is certainly not a perfect solution and could require some flexibility and understanding among your sites, it may be a workable solution in today's technology age that helps to resolve a conflict. If a site invited you for an interview, they know that you are a strong applicant and should not be surprised to learn that you have gotten other interview offers as well.

What Will Happen During These Interviews?

Most applicants return from interviews quite surprised at how little they were interviewed! In other words, most expect to be asked many questions, but in fact, find that they are doing most of the asking during these visits. This is an extremely important reality that will help you prepare for the interview in a way that is different from what you may have expected.

No faculty member will quiz you on statistics, the details of their own recent publications, or the names of historical figures in psychology. Preparing for the interview should not feel like studying for a Psychology midterm. Rather, you should create a list of many questions that you would like to ask while on the interview. In fact, we would suggest that you never run out of questions! Asking questions is a great way to get answers, but for interviewing purposes, it also is a terrific way to convey that you know what you are getting into, you understand what graduate training will involve, you are enthusiastic about this

opportunity, and you are conscientious enough to have done your homework about the program and its training opportunities.

But how do you know what type of questions to ask? Unfortunately, most all graduate programs in clinical psychology sound very similar on paper and on the web. It is hard to get a sense of the factors on which programs vary until you have visited a few. This will not be a problem when you arrive at your fourth interview, but how will you know what to ask on your initial interviews?

One recommendation is to download the program handbook from 2 to 3 graduate programs; it does not matter if they are programs you applied to. Any handbooks will do. Skim through them, and you will start to notice differences. Some may mention multiple practicum opportunities; others will have a standardized training sequence. Some may give students many choices in coursework; others may provide more structure in students' schedules. Some programs offer teaching and research assistantships (TAs and RAs); others may offer fellowships too. Some may have a Comprehensive exam, a Qualifying exam, an Area Paper, or none. Some may require students to complete a Master's thesis; others do not. As you look through handbooks, you may notice a few factors that are especially important to you, and this will give you some ideas of what things to ask when meeting with faculty and graduate students.

Questions to Ask Potential Advisors

- What is your mentoring style?
- How does one earn authorship in this lab?
- How do students select research topics for their own thesis/dissertation, and what role do you play in this process?
- What role do you see me having in this lab if I come here? Is there a grant on which I could work?
- Are there opportunities for summer funding?
- What opportunities are there to get involved in research collaborations with other labs?
- To what extent can my interests as a student be incorporated into the broader interests of your lab vs. how much would I be expected to carry out an existing line of research?
- What supports exist in the department for students wishing to write their own grants?
- What are the current projects in this lab, and in what directions do you expect the lab research to go over the next 5 years?
- How many classes are typically offered to graduate students in (statistics, methods, therapeutic techniques, etc.) each semester/year?
- (For clinical, counseling, and school programs) What practicum opportunities are offered?
- Do most students finish their dissertation before internship or during the internship year?
- What types of statistical consultation are available on campus?
- What type of collaboration (if any) occurs among the clinical faculty (or between the clinical and other faculty if a student has a strong interest in another area)?
- Is it possible and/or typical for students to work with more than one faculty member? How does this work?
- (For clinical, counseling, and school programs) What type of internship placements do students get?
- What types of jobs have graduating students from the program received in the past few years?

Questions to Ask Other Students

- Is it possible to live comfortably on the stipend salary in this town?
- What areas are best for grad students to live?
- Timeline questions: What are the expectations and norms for completion of various program milestones—e.g., Master's, Comps, dissertation?
- What are faculty/student relations like? What's the general climate of the clinical division and the department as a whole?
- What is it like to work with [advisor you are applying to work with]? (e.g., how often does your advisor meet with you? Do you feel like your advisor is either unavailable or a micromanager?)

- (If single and interested in starting a relationship during graduate school) What is life like here for single students? Is this an easy place to meet other young people?
- (If LGBTQ) What is the scene here for LGBTQ individuals? How supportive is the community?
- (If minority) What kinds of resources/supports are available to minority students at this university/program?
- How competitive vs. cooperative are grad students in this program?
- To what extent does the training in this program focus on students' development as researchers vs. clinicians vs. teachers?
- What sorts of teaching opportunities exist here for graduate students? Is there training for new teachers as part of the program?
- Is funding guaranteed for the time I am here? For how long is it guaranteed?

Talking About Research

Perhaps most important, your "interviews" for clinical psychology Ph.D. programs will include reciprocal discussions regarding mutual research interests. Because this is such an important part of the interview process, this section offers some special suggestions and tips.

First, Do Your Homework

When you initially applied to graduate programs, you likely looked for faculty mentors with whom you shared some research interests. Admittedly, in many cases, your match with that faculty member may have been based on a fairly broad understanding of their work (i.e., from a sentence or two on their webpage) and a fairly large range of your own interests. Now that you have been selected for an interview, it is expected that your interests will have matured and narrowed somewhat. Also, it is somewhat expected that your knowledge of this professor's work has become more thorough and informed. Luckily, there are some very easy tools available to help you do this.

You likely will begin your investigation into a faculty member's research interests by looking at their website and downloading recent abstracts and articles from PsycInfo. This remains a terrific approach for learning about the faculty member's work. In addition to reading about the most common themes in their work, as well as understanding the methods they typically use in research (e.g., observational studies, clinical trials, questionnaire-based data collection), be sure also to note whether they seem to be publishing at a reasonable rate (this can vary from 0 to 20 publications within a single year, with a range of 1–5 being quite common) and whether they are publishing with their students as coauthors (or even first authors). This may give you some insight as to whether there will be publication opportunities while you are working together and whether you will be given a chance to collaborate on these publications.

Keep in mind, however, that PsycInfo and many faculty members' websites may give you somewhat "old" information. PsycInfo lists articles currently "in print," which means they were written at least 1 year ago, about a study that may have started many years before then. If the faculty member does not keep their website current, the information listed here also may not reflect recent work.

One solution to help you learn about ongoing research is NIH Reporter (formerly CRISP; see http://projectreporter.nih.gov/reporter.cfm). If the faculty member has a current grant funded by NIH, you can find out all kinds of terrific information about their current work from this site. Do a search by name, and you can read an abstract of their grant, read recent publications, and even get a sense of how much more time this grant will last. This will give you a great idea of exactly what the faculty member is working on and what project you may be involved in should you attend this school. If the faculty member has a grant funded by a private foundation, you may be able to find similar information from the foundation's website.

If the faculty member listed any publications on his/her website or CV as being "in press" in a specific journal, be sure to check that journal's website. Many journals currently preview an "in press" article online for months before it is

"in print." This will give you an opportunity to read about research that has recently been accepted for publication.

As you read through the faculty member's publications and descriptions of the lab's current projects, read "actively." Rather than thinking of this person as a "perfect" researcher who is studying exactly what you want to study, try to think about the ideas you might be able to bring to the lab, and take notes! Some faculty members will be interested during the interview in hearing *your* ideas for research (some may ask you to brainstorm on the spot), and most will be interested in seeing how you think about research. Importantly, any research ideas you propose during the interview should fit with the general research interests of the lab. (For example, if you are interviewing with a faculty member who specializes in ADHD in young boys, you might ask whether she has considered studying gender differences in ADHD; you would probably not want to discuss your interest in eating disorders in adolescent girls [unless the researcher has demonstrated a broad range of interests]).

Second, Speak Up!

During your visit, you will receive an overwhelming amount of information about ongoing research. Every faculty member and current graduate student will have much to say about their current work and upcoming projects. To succeed during this interview process, make sure you talk about your own research experience and interests in detail—at least insomuch as it helps you demonstrate how you are a match to this lab. Although some of this information was written in your personal statement, some of the people you meet may not have had access to this statement or may not have read it very recently. In addition, you may be able to share more details in a manner that helps to more thoroughly explain your experiences. This is important, particularly when considering what the interview process is like for the faculty member.

From the faculty perspective, the Interview Day can be quite confusing and difficult. Faculty members rarely describe their admission decisions as easy. Rather, most agree that there are an overwhelming number of outstanding students, that the students who arrive for any given Interview Day all are quite likely to be very successful, and that the decision of how to rank-order these uniformly excellent candidates is painstaking, frustrating, and even sometimes idiosyncratic. In short, faculty would like a student who (1) they generally get along with; someone who will be pleasant to interact with nearly every day for the next 5 years, and then quite frequently for the rest of their careers; (2) someone with initiative, who will be as passionate and committed to the research in the lab as they are, and who will be invested in the research outcomes you are working on together; and (3) someone who is intellectually stimulating—who will bring great ideas to the table, expand the lab in creative and innovative directions, and augment the caliber of intellectual discussions within research meetings.

This may sound intimidating, but if you express your interests, ideas, and enthusiasm, your natural talents will shine through. If a faculty member describes research you have read about, share your opinions or ideas (e.g., "Have you ever thought of studying X within that framework?" "Why did you decide to use this/that approach?" "How do you think this connects with the X theory?" "I'm interested in seeing how that idea may work differently in X population"). It is common for applicants to feel like everyone else in the room is qualified to be there, but they secretly are the imposter who got invited to the interview due to some computer malfunction. Do not believe this! You have been invited because your experience is exemplary, you have much to contribute, and several faculty members wrote glowing letters about your potential. Be sure to speak your mind, and you will help to show the faculty member and graduate students that you can be a terrific member of their lab!

Third, Be Specific: Maybe

When discussing their approach to admissions, some faculty indicate that they prefer a "blank slate" (i.e., someone who can be taught from scratch and will be shaped mostly by their experiences in the graduate lab). More commonly, however, faculty are looking for someone who may

arrive on campus with their own ideas, experiences, and emerging areas of expertise. This is a tricky balance that you will want to think about before you attend an interview. If you are open to literally anything the faculty member offers as a potential research topic, you may not seem "ready" for graduate school. Some may say that you are more interested in gaining admission than actually doing the work once you get there. On the other hand, if you seem overly fixed on a certain topic or method, despite what you hear during the Interview Day, then some may feel that you are not a match to the research lab or that you are not interested in integrating old with new experiences.

This is a very personal issue, in that there is no "wrong" answer or approach to the interview process. If you indeed are universally interested in all experiences, then it is certainly preferable to be honest about that, rather than portray your interests inaccurately. Conversely, if you are strongly committed to a specific topic, then you should hold out for experiences that will help you grow in your desired direction. Keep in mind that a "balance" probably is a good approach to match with most potential faculty members. Before you attend an interview, therefore, consider what research topics you are most interested in and which are less crucial for your graduate training. Think about what you are most strongly committed to, and how you will represent your research interests when asked. It is quite common for you to be asked what your future career goals may be, what you do or do not like about the research process, and what your research interests are (you may want to plan a 2–4 min response for this one). Most important, think about the research that excites you the most, and use the Interview Day to determine whether you think you can get that research done at the place you are visiting.

Other Interviews

You will not be talking extensively about research in all of your interview meetings. In fact, this may occur mostly with your potential mentor (i.e., the person you requested to work with); yet, there will be other interviews scheduled during the day with other faculty and students. Some of these other people may have divergent research interests from your own, and you are not necessarily expected to be knowledgeable about all of their work. What, then, will you talk about?

The purpose of these interviews often is twofold. First, the program would like to get to know you better to determine whether you are a good match to their overall ideology and "vibe." Are you competitive or collaborative? Do you seem very research-oriented or clinically focused? Do you seem interested in this program?

Second, these interviews are meant to give you a chance to learn as much as you can about the program and your advisor. Be sure to ask lots of questions to help you learn exactly what it would be like to spend the next 4–5 years in this new environment. When meeting with students, be sure to ask very direct questions about your potential mentor and her/his availability, style, and expectations. Students will give you the most direct and helpful information. Make sure to maximize this opportunity to get information!

Other Factors

A few other issues to keep in mind during the Interview season:

1. Interviews can be exhausting. You may have a day of "chain" interviewing—i.e., each meeting may end with an introduction to your next interviewer, or you may have only a very brief break between each meeting. For most people, it is difficult to be "on" for many hours in a row, and if you need to excuse yourself to use the restroom, take some notes, process the information you just heard, or eat a PowerBar on the run, it is perfectly OK to do so. You may want to plan for this in advance.
2. Bring along a nice leather folio that you can carry around with you during the interview day. This will give you something to do with your hands. Fill the folio with a few copies of your CV (occasionally, someone may ask for a copy), some notes on the faculty members' research, and your list of many questions.

It is perfectly appropriate to open your folder and remind yourself of a few questions in the middle of an interview. No one expects you to have everything memorized. It is also fine to jot a note or two down while talking. As long as you are able to engage in a comfortable, socially skilled conversation while you do so, feel free to refer to this folder throughout the interview day, if you think it will help you stay focused and sharp.

3. *Everyone you speak to is part of the admissions process*. The faculty, the students, the staff, all will be part of your graduate program environment and all have valuable information to share with the admissions committee. And they will!
4. If the Interview Day includes an informal time for students and faculty to socialize, take the opportunity to talk with faculty members who may not have been on your schedule. Ideally you will end up at a program where you have a good rapport with many faculty members including your primary advisor; these other faculty members will likely be your professors in classes, they may serve on your Master's and dissertation committees, and you may collaborate with them on research projects. Additionally, many faculty members will have a say in your admissions decision, and if they remember your being a friendly, intelligent, and interesting person, it can help your chances.
5. At many graduate programs, applicants may be invited to an informal reception hosted by graduate students. Although it may look just like a party you attended in college, it is not. Grossly inappropriate behavior at this party will reflect poorly on you and will likely hurt your chances of admission.
6. Most programs will offer the opportunity to stay with a graduate student during your visit to their site. This is a terrific way to get to learn about the program and get to know a student well, but it is not mandatory that you stay with a student. If you do stay with a student in his/her home, remember that anything you tell that student may be reported back to the admissions committee.
7. Thank you notes are not required, and certainly it will make no difference if they are sent by email, snail mail, handwritten, typeset, etc. Most commonly, students send a thank you email to a few of the people they met with during the Interview Day to express gratitude for their visit and to express their level of interest in the site. Although it is not required, it is a good idea to send a thank you note of some sort to the faculty member you are applying to work with and to the student you stayed with (if applicable), and to reiterate how much you enjoyed your visit and how interested you are in the program.
8. Keep in mind that you are not only interviewing for a graduate school position but also creating a professional network. The faculty and students you meet on interview day are the experts in your area of research who will likely be your reviewers when you submit articles and grants, your colleagues and collaborators in future symposia or projects, your search committee when you apply for jobs or postdoctoral positions, and perhaps even your letter writers when you are reviewed for promotion. This realization has several implications. First, of course, make sure you act as professionally and graciously as you can throughout the application process. Second, be considerate if you find yourself in a position of declining an offer or interview. In other words, do not "burn bridges." If writing a note to decline an opportunity, be sure you express your gratitude and continuing interest in their work more broadly. You may decide that this lab or person's research is not the best match for your graduate training, but your paths may indeed cross again.
9. Once you have completed your interview, the waiting begins. In many cases, it will take several weeks until you hear an admissions decision. In some cases, this may mean that the department has not made a final decision (i.e., although your potential mentor may have selected someone, their decision has not yet been ratified by the program, department, or graduate school). In other cases, it may

mean that you are not the first-choice candidate; however, many applicants successfully gain offers from programs that had initially offered a slot to someone else. Remember—almost all applicants invited to an interview are excellent, and the final decision is usually very difficult for faculty. They often are equally happy with several interviewees and simply have to choose an order in which to extend admissions offers.

10. Lastly, once interviews have been completed, you will hopefully start to receive offers of admission. A few tips: (1) You should never, ever feel pressured to make a final decision before April 15. No program or individual should tell you otherwise. (2) Do not officially accept any offer until you have received the details of the offer in writing (by email or mail). There is no fine print to be worried about, but it is still important to be sure that your offer is guaranteed before you start declining other opportunities. (3) If you do hold multiple offers, it is your responsibility to try to narrow your options as quickly as possible. In other words, try not to hold more than two offers at any one time. Someone out there who is just as nervous about this process as you were is still waiting on an offer and cannot hear the good news until you have made your decision. If you can narrow your choices down to two and release any additional offers you may be holding, it will help the system move smoothly for everyone else.

That's it! Good luck to everyone in the application and admissions process!