

HOW TO PLAN AHEAD FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PSYCHOLOGY

***GRADES**

Your GPA is very important! This is something you must keep in mind from your first semester to your last. Once your GPA drops, it can be very difficult to raise it again. We recommend maintaining a minimum 3.5 GPA. Many graduate programs have a lower minimum GPA requirement (usually 3.2-3.0), but this is such a crucial aspect of your application that it is best to make every effort to finish with a GPA above the minimum.

***LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION**

Letters of recommendation will be required for any graduate program you apply to and most will require at least three. Professors will not be able to write strong recommendations if they do not remember who you are. Make sure they remember you by participating in class and doing well on assignments and exams. You do not have to limit yourself to professors, but consider carefully who you ask to write a recommendation and select letter writers who are able to comment very specifically on your abilities to pursue graduate study.

***RESEARCH EXPERIENCE**

It is important to get involved in research to show that you know the field. Also, working in a research lab is a great way to get high-quality letters of recommendation because professors will get to know you better if you work in their labs. To get involved in research at John Jay, go to the Psychology department homepage (www.jjay.cuny.edu/psychology/) and browse Faculty Profiles. Contact professors whose backgrounds or research projects interest you and ask to get involved. If the first person you ask is not accepting students into their lab at the moment, talk with another professor - keep trying!

***GRE SCORES**

Psychology graduate programs require that you take the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) General test and some also require that you take the Psychology GRE Subject test. The General test measures verbal reasoning, vocabulary, quantitative reasoning, critical thinking and analytical writing skills. Minimum scores required vary from program to program. Before you take the Psychology Subject test, check to be sure that it is required for the program(s) you are applying to. (MSW programs do not require the GRE.)

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE! This is not a test that you can “wing” or study for the night before. Use GRE prep books (available from bookstores) and take practice tests often to familiarize yourself with the content and format of the exam. The Office of Graduate School Advising (3300N) has practice tests available for John Jay students. Review basic algebra and geometry (especially if you have not taken a Math course in a while) and study up on your vocabulary.

Give yourself plenty of time to study and sign up for the exam early, just in case you need to take it again. We recommend that you take the exam the summer before you send out your applications for graduate programs.

To register for the GRE, go to www.gre.org or call 1-800-GRE-CALL. Registration is *first-come, first-serve* and spots fill up quickly. Register with enough time to ensure that you get your preferred testing date.

***OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER**

- You will probably be asked to write a *personal statement* for your application. This will be your chance to “sell yourself” to graduate programs. Here are suggestions for questions you might want to answer with your statement, though do not feel that you have to limit yourself to these: What are your motivations for wanting an advanced degree in Psychology and how do you plan to use the degree once you are done? What are subjects of special interest or target populations that you are interested in focusing on in your research activities? Do you have any notable papers you have written or projects you have been involved with? Do you have any role models or life experiences that have sensitized you to the importance of psychology? Take your statement to the Writing Center (2450N) for assistance and guidance.

- If possible, join Psi Chi, the National Honor Society in Psychology. To be eligible you must have completed three semesters, completed nine credits in psychology courses, and have a minimum GPA of 3.0 (overall AND in Psychology). Psi Chi membership applications are available in the Psychology Department (2100N) or online at www.psiichi.org.

- You do NOT have to earn an MA degree first - you can apply straight to a PhD/PsyD program from your BA, if your GPA, GRE scores, and research experience are strong enough. However, students who do not get into a PhD/PsyD program can boost their chances for later acceptance by performing well in an MA program.

PSYCHOLOGY GRADUATE SCHOOL PREPARATION: YEAR-BY-YEAR

Freshman year (0 to 30 credits):

- Get the best grades you can!

Sophomore year (31 to 60 credits):

- Get the best grades you can!
- Get to know your psychology professors (and give them a chance to get to know you).
- Try to get involved with a research lab in Psychology - a professor whose class you took, maybe, or whose research you find extremely interesting. If the first person you ask is not accepting students into their lab at the moment, talk with another professor - keep trying!
- Start to think about what you might like for a career – perhaps think about doing an Internship to help decide.
- Come to the Psychology Department for advisement.

Junior year (61 to 90 credits):

- Get the best grades you can!
- Get to know your psychology professors (and give them a chance to get to know you).
- Get (or stay) involved with research in Psychology.
- Think about professors who can write letters of reference.
- As you narrow down your interests and career goals, research graduate programs that match your interest(s). The library has the APA Guide to Graduate Schools on reserve to help you with this research.
- Prepare for the GRE. Do practice tests, maybe take a prep class.
- Come to the Psychology Department for advisement.

Senior year (90+ credits):

- Get the best grades you can!
- Decide which professors to ask for Letters of Recommendation, and ask. Give your letter writers enough time to complete the recommendation by asking at least 3-4 weeks before you need it. Be sure to give them clear instructions, including due dates, supporting materials (like your personal statement), and stamped, addressed envelopes.
- Consider getting help on your application essays. The Writing Center (2450N) offers workshops on writing personal statements. Professors can be very helpful as well.
- Make sure your GREs, transcripts and letters of recommendation are sent to the schools you are applying to.
- APPLY TO GRADUATE PROGRAMS. In the fall, you would apply for PhD, PsyD, or MA programs; MSW, some MA and a few doctoral programs have deadlines in the spring.

***GRADUATE DEGREES THAT MIGHT BE OF INTEREST**

Doctoral Degrees:

PhD – Applications due in the FALL

PsyD – Applications due in the FALL

Masters Degrees:

MA – Usually will have FALL and SPRING application deadlines

MSW – Applications due in the SPRING

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MASTER OF ARTS IN FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY AT JOHN JAY:

- Students must have graduated from an accredited four-year college with a minimum G.P.A. of 3.0.
- Students must have completed at least 12 undergraduate credits in psychology.
- In addition to these credits, courses in Statistics and Experimental Psychology are required. However, a student may be accepted as a conditional matriculant while completing the latter courses at John Jay College, but before taking master's level courses.
- GRE General test scores are required. GRE minimum scores average around 1000, but somewhat lower scores will be considered.

Fall application deadline: June 30

Spring application deadline: December 1

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE PhD IN FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY AT JOHN JAY:

- Students are unlikely to be competitive if their undergraduate G.P.A. is below 3.5.
- Students are unlikely to be competitive if their GRE (general) scores are under 1200.
- Research experience will be beneficial.

Application deadline: December 1