HOW TO BECOME A WIZARD OF GRADUATE ADMISSIONS FOR PSYCHOLOGY

Best Practices for Admissions Officers and Enrollment Management Professionals
Opportunities for Improving the Admissions and Enrollment Process for Graduate Psychology Programs

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All psychology programs have a common goal: make informed decisions to admit the best-fit applicants to their graduate psychology programs. However, decision makers face several challenges in meeting that goal. Given the specialized nature of the psychology field, programs often struggle with issues related to the accessibility, consistency, and standardization of data. Centralized data provides valuable information and meaningful analysis that drives decision-making at both the program and institution level. Further, standardized data are useful to the psychology discipline as a whole, as it enables the reporting of accurate applicant counts that can be used to better gauge future workforce and employment levels.

In 2002 there were 16,357 Master’s of psychology degrees awarded, compared to 26,834 degrees in 2012—an increase of 64%. And in 2002 there were 4,759 Doctoral psychology degrees awarded, compared to 5,928 degrees in 2012—an increase of 25%. Indications suggest that this trend will continue; indeed, the Bureau of Labor Statistics has estimated occupational growth across the discipline over the upcoming decade. For instance, industrial/organizational psychology is expected to grow 53% between 2012-22; one of the fastest growing occupations in the U.S. economy. As a consequence of growth in graduate education and psychology careers, programs can anticipate greater demands to adopt powerful analytic tools to effectively manage workflow.

Beyond increased application numbers, psychology programs strive to understand critical information about the psychology discipline as a whole as well as their own applicant pool and their pool cycle-over-cycle. This information provides programs with benchmarks of competitiveness, and provides a view of current trends and forecasts to support their missions. Access to cutting-edge tools that permit real-time analysis allows programs to save valuable time and resources, plan strategically, more efficiently collect data for regional and specialized accreditation, and respond to and submit applications for training grants and funding agencies. Powerful analytics complement many of the qualitative decision-making processes (e.g., interviews) that enable graduate psychology programs to identify, select, and admit the best-fit applicants.

Savvy psychology programs also seek opportunities to engage prospective students and build valuable relationships by delivering an exceptional applicant experience. Having the flexibility to customize the application, incorporate unique branding into each touch point, and provide an easy and intuitive interface goes a long way to building loyalty and trust with applicants. Prospective graduate psychology students expect to have a seamless experience and consume information in a variety of ways, including mobile, and want real-time access to the status of their application.
1. ANALYZE YOUR APPLICANT POOL TO TARGET BEST-FIT APPLICANTS

Are you attracting the right applicants for your graduate psychology program? What is your applicant profile? Are you meeting your diversity goals? Are you conducting evidence-based admissions to assess whether components used to select applicants influence academic performance and ensure student success? And if you make a recruiting investment in a new region, what is your return on that investment? If the number of applications grew, would your current process adequately accommodate this growth?

These are questions that the right data and analytics can help you answer. Innovative graduate psychology programs are leveraging tools that help them understand admissions cycles, applicant profiles, forecasts, and benchmark data. Each of these opportunities provides programs more effective ways to evaluate, select, and retain the best-fit psychology program applicants. How can programs maintain a competitive advantage in enrolling qualified psychology applicants? Here is a series of best practices that define best-in-class admissions processes and can ultimately help you become a wizard of graduate admissions for psychology.

Best Practices for Psychology Admissions and Enrollment Professionals

1. ANALYZE YOUR APPLICANT POOL TO TARGET BEST-FIT APPLICANTS

In the back office, programs need to be spending more of their time focusing on building important relationships with prospective psychology students and familiarizing themselves with the strategic initiatives of understanding psychology enrollment trends. Verifying prerequisites, calculating GPAs, authenticating transcripts, opening mail, and digitizing documents are all key areas where automation and outsourcing can drive significant efficiencies in psychology programs while allowing faculty and staff to focus on the more strategic areas of their work.

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2. DELIVER AN EXCEPTIONAL APPLICANT EXPERIENCE

Applicants to graduate psychology programs expect a convenient and efficient application process housed within a single online resource. An easy and intuitive interface provides clear guidance on each psychology program’s unique requirements in terms of transcript needs, coursework/pre-requisites, supporting documents, personal statements, references, and custom questions. Additionally, showing the prospective psychology students their progress (via a progress bar) throughout the application process is another small, but helpful way to improve the applicant experience.

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3. MANAGE YOUR BRAND AND TRANSPARENCY WITH APPLICANTS

Are you making a lasting impression with your psychology applicants? The application process is one of the most important ‘brand’ touch points that you have with prospective psychology students. It’s important to have personalized communications that present your brand in a way that builds trust and loyalty with current and perspective applicants. Personalizing the look and feel of each applicant touch point allows you to maintain your psychology program’s independent identity and engage the applicant from the point of first interest all the way until their first day on campus. It is all about communicating with prospective psychology students in the manner in which they want to consume information. Today’s applicants expect to receive information through a variety of handheld devices, via text messages, and emails. Additionally, they expect information to be available in real-time and to have insights into the status of their application. Proactive communications are important to students on the issues that worry them the most—as their transcript is received, as letters of reference come in, as due dates approach, and as their application moves through key status points. Delivering communications via mobile and in a proactive way results in quicker response times and more compelling interactions.

4. MINIMIZE PRINTING OF DOCUMENTS FOR APPLICATION REVIEW

Today, more and more psychology programs are realizing the inefficiencies associated with printing of documents and moving toward fully digitizing the admissions process while leveraging the ability to make better admissions decisions. Spending time on activities like opening mail, transcript verification, and GPA calculations takes valuable time away from more strategic initiatives like attracting and ultimately selecting the right applicants to grow and optimize your psychology program. Going paperless can improve transparency, facilitate information sharing, and help support remote staff to be as productive as possible. Becoming a wizard of psychology admissions means shifting away from the burden of costly administrative tasks and moving toward a full-range digital dashboard that can support key admissions decisions and reduce overhead costs.

Introducing PSYCAS to Support Best Practices in Graduate Psychology

Liaison International, the leader in admissions management solutions, has partnered with the American Psychological Association (APA), to launch PSYCAS, a centralized application service for candidates in graduate psychology programs available in January 2015. Innovative graduate psychology programs across the country will leverage best practices in psychology admissions and enrollment through PSYCAS, which is available for free to psychology programs.

Talk to a PSYCAS expert today about how to evaluate your current admissions and enrollment processes, as well as how to become a wizard of psychology admissions.

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ABOUT PSYCAS
The American Psychological Association has partnered with Liaison International, the leader in admissions management solutions for higher education, to simplify the application process for candidates applying to graduate psychology programs nationwide and facilitate the admissions process for graduate-level psychology programs. PSYCAS will deliver an exceptional applicant experience by allowing students to research and apply to multiple schools and psychology programs using a single electronic platform that stores common application criteria. This streamlined process will eliminate duplication of effort for students, including data entry, ordering of transcripts, and requesting references and provides an easy, intuitive interface that helps students navigate and simplify the application process. PSYCAS gives psychology programs access to a national platform for promotion and visibility, data collection and management, and the sharing of best practices.

ABOUT THE AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION
The American Psychological Association is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States. APA is the world's largest association of psychologists, with nearly 130,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants and students as its members. There were approximately 30,000 Master's and 80,000 doctoral applications for graduate study in 2014. APA's mission is to advance the creation, communication and application of psychological knowledge to benefit society and improve people's lives.

ABOUT LIAISON INTERNATIONAL
Liaison International provides admissions management solutions to more than 4,500 higher education programs. Over the last 20+ years, we have built strong relationships with educational associations and we power some of the most admired admissions offices in the country with our Centralized Application Service (CAS™) and UniCAS™ solutions. Our comprehensive software, integrated services, and data analytics platform are proven to remove administrative burdens, facilitate more powerful analysis of a program's applicant pool, and enable experienced admissions staff to focus on the core responsibilities of recruitment and enrollment, to ultimately admit the best-fit applicants to their programs.