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## BECOMING A PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENTIST: A SERIES TO SUCCESSFULLY APPLY TO GRAD SCHOOL AND HELP DIVERSIFY THE FIELD:

### SESSION 8: NAVIGATING YOUR FIRST YEAR OF GRADUATE SCHOOL (LIVE Q&A, APRIL 14)

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#### TRANSCRIPT

**Shandol Hoover:** Hello everyone, and welcome. I'm Shandol Hoover, Science Programs Officer at the American Psychological Association. Thank you for joining us today. Please let us know where you are from by saying hello in the chat. Today's program is the eighth session of becoming a psychological scientist, a multi-part series about navigating the application process for doctoral programs in psychological science. Applying to grad school can be challenging and deeply personal, but it's worth the effort and we hope our time together brings you closer to success.

We encourage you to visit our Becoming a Psychological Scientist webpage to check out the rest of the videos in the series. We've talked through the top things to know as you apply, writing a compelling essay, how to interview, guidance for students of color, once you get those offers, how to select a program, that feels like a good fit, applying to post-bacc positions, a video on the financial aspects applying to an attending grad school. Today, we'll talk about navigating your first year of graduate school.

We also invite you to subscribe to *Science Spotlight*, a free newsletter open to all. Subscribe today and be among the first to know about funding opportunities and resources for psychological scientists. Before we get started, I want to share a few quick announcements. First, thanks to those of you who submitted questions for today's program. We'll try to get to as many of those questions as possible. We also invite you to ask questions during the program using the Q and A feature on your dashboard.

Last, this program is being recorded. Everyone who registered will receive an email with a link to the recording and about two weeks. Without further ado, I'll turn things over to Dr. Adrienne Stith Butler, Deputy Chief for the APA Science Directorate.

**Dr. Adrienne Stith Butler:** Thank you so much, Shandol. Welcome, everyone. Happy Friday to you. It's so great to see all the greetings in the chat and people who are joining us from all over the globe. I am the Deputy Chief and the Science Directorate. I'm thrilled to have you all here today. I'll start with some introductions of our panelists, and then we're going to get right to questions and discussion. We have a wonderful panel today. We have two graduate students and two faculty members. I will start with Andrea Wigglesworth. She is a member of the Seneca-Cayuga Nation and a fourth year graduate student in the Clinical Science and Psychopathology research program at the University of Minnesota.

She works with doctors Bonnie Klimes-Dougan and Katie Cullen and the research on Adolescent Depression Lab, focusing on youth suicide risk and resilience. Andrea is interested in the relationship between forms of stress and suicidal thoughts and behavior in childhood and adolescence with a focus on the neurobiological and psychophysiological mechanisms that inform how these constructs are related. Andrea is passionate about advancing suicide research for Native American young people.

Next, I'm happy to welcome Sandra Gomez. She is an advanced doctoral student in the counseling psychology program at Teachers College Columbia University. She was born in Illinois, with strong ties to Durango, Mexico, where she spent much of her upbringing with familia. She works with Dr. George Gushue as a lab lead for his social cognition and career lab. Rooted in social justice efforts and collective healing, her research focuses on ethnic identity development, the acculturative experiences and educational and career trajectories of Latinx immigrants and their children. Sandra is also passionate about providing culturally responsive and accessible Spanish bilingual and bicultural services to Latinx populations.

Next, I'm happy to introduce Dr. Celeste Malone, who is an Associate Professor in the School of Psychology at Howard University. Her primary research interests relate to multicultural and diversity issues embedded in the training and practice of school psychology. Specifically, her work addresses the development of multicultural competence through education and training, diversification of the profession of school psychology, and the relationship between culturally responsive practice and pre K-12 edge student outcomes. Dr. Malone is the 2022/2023 president of the National Association of School Psychologists and is a second person of color to ever serve in that role. Congratulations.

Dr. Alex Ophir is Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at Cornell University. He's an experimental psychologist and his research aims to understand the proximate control of social behavior and the ultimate consequences of social and cognitive systems. His research program focuses on how the postnatal social environment shape adult behavior and neural phenotype, how the social brain shapes mating decisions and the neurogenomic mechanisms that govern variation in social behavior.

Welcome. It's wonderful to have such a varied panel, and I'm going to start with questions. I think I'll pose the first one to Andrea. Just imagine that we're at a coffee shop, in a living room or something, and just having a casual conversation. If you want to insert a comment on something that someone else has said, please feel free to do that and anything else that comes to you that you think would be of interest to the folks who are joining us today. Andrea, what are the best ways to prepare the summer before graduate school to set yourself up for success in the first year?

**Andrea Wiglesworth:** This is such a good question. I think a lot of the things that I ended up doing before graduate school did actually help a lot for success first year, but they weren't intentional. Hopefully, with having this conversation, other folks will be able to put some more intention behind it. I think one would be asking the folks that you're working with about data available in the lab and potential project ideas. Where does the lab see itself going throughout the course of the year, so that you have that time to know what is

possible and be curious, start brainstorming things that you're interested in all before the stress of classes hit you.

It'll give you more time to read different papers, be curious about these different constructs. Maybe there are measures you have never heard of before, and you can do that a little bit more leisurely in the summer. Particularly, if your program requires having a first-year project. I think it's a really good idea to getting a jumpstart on some of that, but then my second, somewhat contradictory, but also complimentary thought here is rest. Enjoy those months before grad school, get some rest, engage in some hobbies, especially hobbies or habits you want to maintain throughout grad school.

I feel like it is really vital that you don't spend all of that time that summer trying to work and get ahead, but really thinking about who you are as a whole human being and putting some of those creative fulfillment needs first during that time. Interested to hear if others have thoughts on this too.

**Sandra Gomez:** I was going to say something similar. The summer before you really get into the program is amazing because you're getting a PhD or a master's, whatever, but you're still not in the nitty gritty yet. You can really spend that time being creative, imagining what projects you want to do, and especially resting and finding what is going to really ground you during those next couple years.

**Dr. Stith Butler:** Thank you. I'm wondering if our faculty folks have any insights or suggestions for that.

**Dr. Celeste Malone:** I think those are some wonderful suggestions that were provided, especially the rest part, because to prepare yourself for this transition, especially if you have to relocate for your program as well, and so taking that time to reconnect with family and friends and to prepare yourself to transition perhaps to a new city, as well as if it's possible getting some time to acclimate yourself to that area as well. For example, within school psychology programs where we're working in school districts right away, it was nice to be on campus a couple of weeks early just to get a lay of the land, but then also just to explore the neighborhoods, because we were going to be spending so much time there.

Just anything that would be restorative to you to have a good transition, because it is a major life phase, and preparing yourself accordingly for that.

**Dr. Alex Ophir:** Yes, I agree. Sadly, it's been a hot minute since I was preparing for graduate school. For me, one of the most important things was doing exactly what we just heard. I actually went out at the beginning of the summer, I had a couple of months to move, to get settled in and actually start working in the lab and get to know the department that I was joining, without any pressures of classes or teaching assistantships and all those kinds of things that start to pile on and that you have to start to juggle. It allowed me to ease into the work and to generate ideas like we heard at the beginning. I felt that was really useful. Yes, get rest, know yourself, I agree with those things too.

**Dr. Stith Butler:** Thank you. That's great advice. The next question actually is related and it's once you start your program. That question is, how do you balance the many demands

of being a graduate student and how do you maintain work and life balance? I'm going to pose that to Sandra first.

You may be having--

**Sandra Gomez:** I'm still trying to figure it out. Okay. Can you hear me now?

**Dr. Stith Butler:** We can hear you now, yes. [silence] Oh.

**Sandra Gomez:** Okay, good. I was just saying that's a great question. I'm still trying to figure that out myself. Did I go out again? I'm so sorry. Can you hear me now?

**Dr. Stith Butler:** Yes.

**Sandra Gomez:** Okay. I'm scared to talk because I'm scared it'll cut out again. [chuckles]

**Dr. Stith Butler:** Do you want to try turning off your video while you're telling us about that a little bit and see if that might help? [crosstalk]

**Sandra Gomez:** [crosstalk]

**Dr. Stith Butler:** Yes, why don't we-- Sandra, we'll give you a minute. Maybe what I'll do is see if we can work that out. Ask Celeste if she can address that question.

**Dr. Malone:** Sure. I know it's quite a challenge, because it's all of these new demands. Then the hidden time requirements, because I often think-- I'll speak for myself as well. I was expecting to go to classes and then build in time for my assistantship practicum. I thought I had all of the things that I had to include on my schedule, but then all of these random smaller expectations would come up that, oh, well, these study group meetings, we're to participate in this activity. Just trying to get a clearer sense of my time, my calendar, my Google calendar has been a Godsent, that I schedule everything in there.

What I ended up doing, and it feels weird to do so initially, but scheduling my own personal activities in there. For example, I like to work out at home. When I was in grad school, I used YouTube videos and Cable on Demand all the time to work out. I would actually schedule that into my calendar, because otherwise, with so many competing demands, it could get pushed to the side that, oh, well, let me finish working on this paper, or let me go to the library first, or all of these other tasks that you're putting off and then not taking care of yourself.

It's identifying what are the activities that are most restorative to you. Spending time with family, perhaps eating dinner with family and friends and being intentional about carving that out. Even writing time, that's another big one, especially for graduate students and faculty. Again, the competing demands, but it's essentially scheduling meeting for yourself, because when you put it on your calendar, it's right there at the forefront and less likely to be overlapped with other activities because you're already deliberately blocking out the time for it. That you have to, just like you wouldn't miss class and you put your classes on the calendar, make sure that you are putting the things for you on your calendar also.

**Dr. Stith Butler:** That's wonderful advice, Celeste, for graduate school and beyond. Wonderful. Sandra, whenever you are able, please feel free to just go ahead and chime in as to where we are in the conversation.

**Andrea Wigglesworth:** I can add a couple of points there too, if that's helpful.

**Dr. Stith Butler:** Wonderful.

**Andrea Wigglesworth:** I think the other thing with adding things to your calendar and figuring out your schedule is trying to figure out what works for you as far as switching the types of demands. I'm in a clinical psychology program and that means I'm doing classwork, research and clinical work and then a few couple years ago, also doing TAing and some folks have these four, three or four different hats to be putting on. You might find that you're a person that really prefers to do all of your classwork in one block. You have on your student hat, and all of your clinical-related work in one block or teaching-related work.

Some other people really like doing a little bit of each day. I think just being curious about and being willing to try different things and figuring out exactly what work style works best for you.

**Dr. Stith Butler:** Thank you, Andrea.

**Dr. Ophir:** One thing for me, just to add slightly other points. When I joined grad school, I knew it was going to be hard, but I didn't know what that meant. When I got there, what I realized is any one thing I could do, but it was doing it all at the same time, that was really the challenge, that's to me what made grad school hard. Finding a way to balance those things, I think is really important. I think about it. I'll also say, and I don't know if this is good news or bad news, but in my experience, if you remember, at the undergrad stage you look back to high school and thought, "Oh man, I thought I was busy then, but I have all this time now." When you get to grad school, you'll say the same thing about your undergrad days.

Trust me, it doesn't stop, when you get to my stage, you say that about your grad school days as well. It just keeps getting busier and busier. I think what it happens is your threshold for being able to juggle more things goes up. There's at least one trick that I have found that's useful for me that I'll share, which is I imagine a square with four quadrants. One column would be urgent things and the other would be non-urgent things. One row would be important things and the other is not important things. Your whole goal is to basically ignore the not important, not urgent things and just don't do those. I'm talking just work things here, not life things.

You might think, oh, it's the urgent important things you should give all your energy to. What I would say is your goal is to minimize what goes into that box by doing things that are important but not urgent. Maximize things in the important and not urgent box as much as you can. Depending on, because we're all going to have very different experiences, whether you're a clinical psychologist or experimental psychologist or this discipline or that, the kinds of things that go in that box will differ. It's up to you to figure out what goes

where but calibrate and try and maximize what goes where. I found that's been a helpful rubric.

**Dr. Stith Butler:** I love that. I want to try that now. [laughs] Thank you. Thanks, Alex. Alex, actually, I'm going to ask you the next question, which is, can we hear about a day in the life of a first-year student? What is that like? What's the flow of life when you're starting your program?

**Dr. Ophir:** Yes. It's a perfect lead into what I was just saying, which is that every experience is going to be very different. In one program, you might have a lot of courses expected of you. In my program here at Cornell, our first-year grad students have to take statistics for their whole first year. They take, actually it's a course I teach, but it's a boot camp, getting ready for grad school. How to write and how to give presentations and professional development kinds of things. That's a semester. Those are the only courses that are required of them, really, for the whole program. Sometimes, you'll have lots of classes, sometimes you won't.

As I said, in our first-year program, we have those, you'll usually have at least statistics is my guess, in every program, but the coursework, it's unlike undergrad as far as I can tell. Undergrad it's very course focused. In grad school, it's a whole different ballgame, at least from the experiences that I've seen and had, where courses are important and you should do well, but it's really more about either the research project or the dissertation project that you're working toward, and how you balance that can vary.

There's philosophies of different advisors, if you're in that apprenticeship model, that some people say, in your first year, you should be doing a project and collecting data right away. Others say, you know what, take the year, read deep, think, and then by the end of year, you should have a project. It's hard to really capture what the first-year experience is going to be, because they're going to be so different. A lot of that though, I think comes down to knowing your program, knowing your advisor, getting as good as you can, concrete expectations. To some extent, you're likely going to be doing some degree of research, working on your dissertation project, collecting data and all of that.

Probably doing some teaching assistantships, but not necessarily, there are lots of fellowships and other ways to support yourself that you might have that free you from teaching. Those can be very big demands on your time. Then there's all the other stuff, departments often have symposia or colloquia that they want you to go to, journal clubs. I think finding the right way to titrate how much effort you put to those things can be really important, because they can really be a suck of your time and they can almost be expected, but not expected, if you know what I mean. It can be hard. That's one of the hard, juggling so many things.

Talk to your new peers, talk to the people that have been there for a while, talk to the other newbies that you're joining the program with, talk to your advisors, talk to other faculty members, and get a sense of what you really ought to be doing to help balance, but you can expect some flavor of a lot of those things. Sorry, I talk a lot. I'm sorry.

**Dr. Stith Butler:** No, so helpful. Thank you, Alex.

**Dr. Malone:** I wanted to add on a little bit to that, because I agree, it's getting involved with research, getting acclimated to your class schedule, which is such an adjustment from undergrad. In my area, school psychology, we also have that practice element, that clinical element. Our first-year students, they spend a significant amount of time in our assessment lab, that they have the assessment courses that they're taking during their first year of the program. Then there's also this lab component to it, where they're not just sitting in the class, but then practicing scoring. Finding kids to practice these tests on, or they're practicing it with each other.

It was important for them to build that time to be on campus, because students may think that they're free at that time. Again, to really become proficient at the test, there is that need beyond going to your classes, the opportunity to really engage in practice, to build time out, to score your protocols and building that in. Then for our first-year students, especially in the master's level, they also start their practicum experiences. You may also hear it referred to as externship. Either way, these are the clinical experiences that graduate students are having prior to their internship, which is a culminating experience.

Our classes as a result, were primarily in the evening, that students would be at their practicum sites during the day, a couple of days a week, and then afterwards, they're coming to campus for classes at like around five o'clock or so. All that to say, as you think about the timing of it, it really does depend on the nature of your program, that if you are going into a practice-oriented space, there is a research expectation, but then you also need to build in the time for the development of your practical skills even before you formally start externship.

**Dr. Stith Butler:** Thank you so much, Celeste. This is a question that is maybe a little bit different terms. Can you offer any advice to non-traditional, first-generation students who feel they are behind their peers' timelines? Maybe I'll ask Andrea, if you could address that first.

**Andrea Wiglesworth:** Yes, this is such an important topic. I am a first-gen student and I felt very similarly behind my peers' timelines. I replied to someone in the Q and A about pre-graduate school. I did not have any publications, at that point I had some conference presentations, and I knew that some folks going into graduate school did already have publications from prior labs. Something you don't really learn until you're in graduate school is that individual labs have very different ways of deciding who gets authorship on a publication.

Learning that helped me a little bit feel a little less behind, because in general, it's not the same starting point for everyone because of these differences in cultures that we aren't super aware of. In thinking about what to do or advice, I think my first point is that even your peers who come from different backgrounds, who may feel more prepared for graduate school, whether they have family members who are professors or in academia broadly, still also feel very overwhelmed. You are not alone in feeling overwhelmed or unprepared or a little nervous. I think everyone does feel that way. That's not to say that it's

not true that there might be some hidden curriculum things that you'll find yourself needing to learn and find out.

I think if you have an advisor, if you have a mentor-based program, talking with your advisor about this explicitly, I think is really helpful. Asking them for an assessment of where do I need to make some progress on? What do you see as my strengths right now? Make tangible smart goals together for that first year. What can you really do in that first year to improve some of these skills, or get ahead in some of these areas where you feel a little bit behind? For me, I applied to the NSF GRFP graduate research fellowship program before graduate school and was told that I needed publications. I knew in order to apply again, working on projects that could be published would be really important for that application.

I talked with my advisor and made specific tangible goals about research projects and opportunities to move projects forward for publication. We kept having those goal setting conversations throughout the course of the year. I think just expressing that out loud can be really helpful. Then I also would say connect with others and find a community of students who can give you advice and give you insights and let you learn from their harder journeys along the way. We've all had to go about this in our own ways with more or less support. I think that you can learn a lot from talking to other first-gen students or non-traditional students and learning more about their paths in how they navigated graduate school.

**Dr. Stith Butler:** Thank you, Andrea. That's wonderful advice. Sandra?

**Sandra Gomez:** I'm going to try and pop in. I apologize for my internet issues.

**Dr. Stith Butler:** No problem.

**Sandra Gomez:** I'm also a first-generation student and this is definitely something I've felt and couldn't name initially at first, why I felt like I just wasn't enough sometimes or the imposter like syndrome feeling coming out. I think really, what helps and that was already said, was really being honest with my advisor and asking questions even if they felt like, oh, I should know this already. Also, being honest about responsibilities that I have with my own family. I think I felt really alone in balancing the responsibilities I have with own family and my academic responsibilities and not sure if other people understood that.

Finding the community was really important to be able to just talk about that really honestly, and also, being honest with my advisor about things that I'm juggling. I think part of my fear was that my advisor would regret picking me or something like that, because I have all these other things that I'm balancing, but I really did open up the door and made me closer with my advisor and made me feel like I do deserve to be in the spot and it's okay. Also, it also influenced the work and research I even do. That community and transparency provides support more meaning to be able to bring my full self into these academic spaces too.

**Dr. Stith Butler:** Thank you, Sandra. I'm wondering how you found your communities. With Sandra or Andrea, whether you could say how you went about doing that.



**Andrea Wiglesworth:** I was a part of a few different groups. On Facebook, there's a Native American graduate student group. I joined that group. Very luckily, near the second half of my first year, some graduate students had posted on there about wanting to get a group of folks in clinical and counseling psychology programs together, to have a group that support and did research together. That was a really useful community for me, especially being the only native person in my program.

Not having that many native mentors in the field of psychology before graduate school, being able to connect with other native graduate students about our experiences, our interests, some of those differences in culture and ways of relating to one another that we were experiencing in our programs, was so incredibly useful. Also, I think leveraging social media. I started posting on Twitter probably, I don't know when. Maybe after my first year. I have met so many wonderful people through that platform, that we have been able to form these groups to support one another and talk about our experiences navigating graduate school.

Definitely reaching out to community in whatever way, whether that is in your program or outside of your program. I think both can be incredibly meaningful.

**Dr. Stith Butler:** Thank you, Andrea. I imagine that both are very important to the folks outside of your program and your university as well as within. Sandra?

**Sandra Gomez:** Yes, I was just going to say social media is such an incredible tool. And I was going to say something about how I'm so in awe how much community you can find on Twitter. This is a little bit newer for me, but I have also met different folks with similar interest that I have worked on different projects with. Also, I'm just going to plug the National Latinx Psychological Association because X populations too. Oh, I'm breaking up. I don't know what everyone heard but--

**Dr. Stith Butler:** Yes, we caught some of that.

**Sandra Gomez:** Okay. Yes, I was just plugging in the National Latinx Psychological Association. I think that's where I got to know most of the other Latinx students and psychologists in the field that I consider part of my community. It has been really helpful to connect with others who may have navigated similar experiences.

**Dr. Stith Butler:** Okay. Thank you. I'm going to take a question. Actually, before I-- This is really a different topic but maybe I'll ask Celeste or Alex if you had any reflections on that last question.

**Dr. Malone:** Yes, I was thinking about it. I think it's such a great question. It's such an important question to ask, because people are socialized to academia so differently and those hidden rules and norms. I think the advice given was wonderful, but at the same time, I also think we need to challenge the notion of what it means to be behind, because where are we supposed to be in the first place? Especially when I think, and I thought there was a question in the Q and A about older students. I came into my program not straight from undergrad. I worked for a few years. I was in my late 20s when I entered my doctoral program.

My cohort was a mix of those who came right from undergrad and then a couple of other older students around my age. What I actually found was that sometimes, my colleagues from undergrad, it was still some of that same type of mentality around that. What I mean by it is, what are the things that I need to check off that often in undergrad, it's a very clear list and trajectory of where you're supposed to go and these accomplishments that you're supposed to have and brought a lot of that thinking in with them and was thinking rather individualistically. I think part of my experience, one, was being from a culture that had a more collectivist orientation.

Anyway, we're all here in the same place. We all have different career goals and backgrounds, so we're not in competition with each other. That was my mentality going about it, as I encouraged to share resources and changing some of those norms. I say all of that, because these comparisons are somewhat arbitrary, and it's overwhelming for everyone. You only know what people choose to present you with. As you are wondering and anxious about this exam coming up, or I'm further behind on my dissertation research, or wow, I heard this wonderful and I can't do that, I guarantee you that there are many others in that room that are thinking the exact same thing, but it's whether or not they'll say it out loud.

You're left thinking, I'm the only one thinking that, when that's simply not true. Again, debunking that notion. I also think it's something to explore when you're interviewing for the program itself, and getting a glimpse of that program culture, because the unfortunate reality is that in some academic departments, they actually encourage a spirit of competition among graduate students. That is, actively, students are pushed in that type of way. That may not be the environment for you, for some, they will thrive under those conditions because of the external pressure, but for others that's not going to be the supportive space for them.

I think it's important just to get a sense from faculty as well as current students, if you have the opportunity to speak to them in the interview process, what that culture is like there, because you were admitted, that means that you deserve to be there, that you belong there. To take your rightful place there and that you have a variety of experiences that aren't always academic in nature either, that you are bringing and contributing that is going to help you be successful as a psychologist, but also provide a unique lens for your cohort members and faculty members to be able to learn from you.

**Andrea Wiglesworth:** I just want to say that's such good advice and so important. I want to retweet that so much, because it is so relevant and knowing if you want that supportive collectivist place and setting, versus these more competitive settings. I think I was really blessed that my cohort was incredibly collaborative. We would talk about like, "Oh, I didn't really understand this reading. Do you understand?" Have those genuine conversations. That opened up for so much more learning for all of us. Also, you mentioned, Celeste, that there's-- people have different experiences and different strengths.

We had some people who are really statistically minded and then some people going into graduate school like me that really were not, and we did homework together every Tuesday, to talk about this and to get on the same page. Really leaning into that

community and seeing our different experiences and skills and expertise as assets, not as something that's holding someone back.

**Dr. Ophir:** Yes, I just want to chime in with maybe just two or three thoughts, brief ones. Number one, I'm a straight cis white guy with a lot of privilege and I acknowledge that. Even I have all of those insecurities that we've been hearing about. I think it's inherent to this discipline, to this job career. I think it's probably heightened for people that don't have the experience that I have. I can only speak to that through my own students because I tend to really do my best to find talent in people that come from communities that are maybe first-gen or marginalized in one way or the other.

One of the things that I think was Sandra was saying that I really want to echo is, talk to your advisors. Now, not everybody is going to be receptive. That's a whole other ball of wax, but some are going to be very open to hearing this because they're just oblivious to the experiences you have, and you are in a position to teach them and to work with them. If you have that good trusting relationship, then I think that that's a really good opportunity to talk about how for example, my family doesn't understand why I'm wasting my time doing this, but I really want to do it. I have that battle that I have to fight when I go home or I'm on the phone.

Talk to your advisors, look for the support. I heard this said as well. Look for the support in your first-year cohort or in in in the community around you. Also, one thing we have here at Cornell, and I don't know how common it is but there's a lot of clubs based on exactly these things. Campuswide, for example, first-gen we have a group called Figley. We have a group of Latinx and the Black Grad Student Association, and all of these groups, you can find communities independent of your discipline, to find those kinds of support to build you up. I want to encourage people to look for those things in the institutions that they're joining.

**Dr. Stith Butler:** That's all wonderful advice. Thank you so, so much. That's great. I have a question about research topics. That is, after acceptance how do you begin to decide on the area of emphasis that you're going to undertake within your program? I'll pose that first to Celeste, if you want to take a first crack at that.

**Dr. Malone:** Sure. it was a conversation with my advisor, that I knew what I wanted to explore more generally, but at the same time, you don't know what you don't know unless you may be coming from this discipline. Let me just put that out there. If you're coming with a master's and you may have a better sense, but I had a broad area and was hoping that I will be able to refine that. It was through those conversations that I had with my advisor and my introductory courses to the profession as well, introduction to school psychology that really helped me to make some initial connections about how can I take some of my initial interests, what brought me to school psychology in the first place, and translate it into actual research that's somewhat consistent [chuckles] with what I'll be supported doing it with the faculty.

That was an exploration process. I think for me, writing is a way for me to think out loud. In my introduction to school psychology class, that's where I explored a lot of topics,

because I was doing it for a class assignment, and it would be a great motivation to read more broadly and be able to consolidate how can I make this fit with what I want to do? It was through those experiences, being exposed to more readings, and the more I talked to faculty, they would send interesting articles my way. That helped me to define it. I always say to my students, closed mouths don't get fed. It's important to develop relationships with multiple faculty and not being afraid to step outside of your program either.

I had conversations with counseling psychology faculty in my department as well, to see what projects that they were interested in, and how I could maybe adapt that to a school-based context. All that to say, it's about making connections and coming in with an open mind and how you could take the core knowledge you already have in accommodating the new information you're getting in your program.

**Dr. Stith Butler:** Thank you, Celeste. Maybe, Alex, I can ask you from your point of view, from your, institution your sub-discipline, how you would answer that question.

**Dr. Ophir:** Yes, thanks. Celeste nailed it. I basically say, ditto. What I have noticed, and even in my own self, my philosophy on how I want to interact with first-year students to get them going has changed as I've gotten older in my career. I started very much wanting them to just get jump-started. I'd give them project that was maybe ready to go, just to get them doing something. In the meantime, I would encourage them to think about what they really care about and all of that. I still try to do that, but I've moved away from that a little bit. I'm more now in the camp of, take the time in your first year to just read and think as deeply as we can. This is my style. Not everybody does this, but I meet with all my students once a week, minimum.

In other words, come more, but I'm blocking off at least an hour a week for you. In that time, we're batting ideas, and they're not always winners, but it's just talking science and getting those ideas generated. You eventually need to do this dance of figuring out what I like and what you like and where we can come together. Sometimes, that takes longer than others, depending on the student and the advisor relationship. When you get there, it's just this wonderful moment. That, in my mind, is where the PhD actually starts.

It's like, the master's phase, if you will, is I'll give you something, you work on it, but the PhD, the candidate phase and you've earned it, is when you're thinking on your own, and in those big picture ways. Now, all I'm doing is just guiding you and maybe checking that you put the commas in the right places and stuff like that. The idea generation is honestly the best part of this job. It's the best part of this job. There's a lot of fun and there's a lot of bad, but that part is the best, in my humble opinion. I feel those ideas, work with them. If you feel unprepared, that's fine. Go in with just wacko ideas. That's where it starts. You have got to start with something.

**Dr. Malone:** I love that. I agree with you. The idea generation stage is so wonderful. Just to echo, related to the previous question we were talking about, about feeling behind. Students have the most incredible ideas, and it's shaped by their lived experiences and connecting that to the discipline. I think that's the most exciting thing to watch, as they have this knowledge that they're coming in with, and they're learning the technical and

theoretical aspects of psychology, and starting to make these connections, to be able to explore things that are really meaningful to them.

Yes, echoing the conversations, because you want your research, you want to feel connected to that. What brought you to graduate school in the first place, because you want to spend a lot of time working on it, so it should be meaningful.

**Andrea Wiglesworth:** I also think for some people, it changes over time too. For some people, they're doing the same thing throughout graduate school that they planned on doing, and for some people, they're doing something drastically different in year four than they were doing in year one, but that all starts with this idea generation and really reading and getting into the work and being able to think about it more deeply. Just getting started will eventually lead you to the thing that you feel the most interested and the most passionate about, but you have to get started to do it. Just putting something out there and knowing there are other people here too who can chime in.

I also think for me, the best ideas have come out of conversations with other people. Maybe even conversations with other people who do slightly different work than I do, so just talk about it.

**Dr. Ophir:** Yes. I wanted to say exactly that point, Andrea, I'm so glad you did. Which is talk to your cohort, people outside your area. Whether it's over a cocktail or a mocktail or whatever, that social interaction is so-- some of my best friends in my life were from my first-year cohort, and some of the best conversations I had about my science and theirs and the ideas that I actually pursued and they pursued came from those conversations. It doesn't have to just be the advisor. In other words, yes, retweet. [laughs]

**Dr. Stith Butler:** [laughs] Thank you. A thread through many of the questions that we've been discussing have been about your advisor, your mentor. There are questions that are coming in live about how you form a relationship with an advisor that's supportive, and how do you adjust when it's not going quite right. I'm going to throw that to anyone who would like to answer.

**Dr. Ophir:** Okay. My graduate advisor was a difficult person to work with. I felt very alone, and I felt I had no other options, and I was too stubborn to get kicked out of the program. I came close, [chuckles] and I was too stubborn to quit, because I don't know, I guess I'm stubborn in that regard. It could have been a very different experience. In hindsight, I would've done more homework on the kind of person he was and the people he graduated, and talked to the students when interviewing. There were flags, I should have seen that I didn't see. None of his graduate students ever went on to a career after that except for maybe one, his first one. I was one of his last students, so it was challenging in that respect.

I slogged through it and I don't necessarily recommend that. There are opportunities at the programs sometimes, to switch labs. That can be a very scary and hard choice, but you have to do self-care. There are people that could have wonderful careers, who get ruined because they have a bad relationship with their advisor. Lean into the people around you,

your committee, is meant to be your brain trust, not just scientifically, though that's maybe the main one, but you'll have a research committee of other PIs, and you can talk to them and sometimes they can be your lifeline. If the need comes to jump ship, do so.

Also, there are other programs, you can get a degree and go somewhere else, if it's really bad. There are usually some, whatever they call it. Different places have different titles, I'm sure. Here we have something called the director of graduate studies. Part of their job is to help you navigate those difficult things. There's also University Ombudsman. Sometimes, those people don't have much power, but they can at least be a sounding board. At the end of the day, if you find yourself in that toxic situation, find an advocate. Just find an advocate. There will be someone who is willing to listen and help. I can't tell you who that person will be, but it's rough. It can really take a toll.

That's the sad truth of this discipline, because we are all people and some of us are really good people and some of us are not very good people. Some of us are good in this case, but not that case. Then lastly, I'll say sometimes, everyone is well-intended, but the mix just doesn't work. There's a relationship. It's a four to six-year marriage, if you will. Sometimes, those marriages work out wonderfully, and sometimes they just don't. Sometimes it's no one's fault. Sometimes, there's a clear fault, but whatever the case is, find that advocate, know yourself, and try before anything else, I would say, to have a dialogue with your advisor. If it's not working out, work to identify ways in which you communicate.

They talk about the love language. Find your love language with your advisor, if you will. Maybe they are actually praising you and you don't realize it.

**Dr. Malone:** Yes, I think that's such a great point. I echo so many of the things that you said and really want to amplify the recommendation of talking to former students or current students in the program during that interview, if possible, or if they're not there, asking if you could be connected to one, because you can make that request as well. Even that initial response should tell you something about that potential advisor, if they are reluctant to share that information or why do you want this? Okay. That's somewhat of a flag. If they are willing to share this, that would suggest that they are not afraid of what their advisees and former students are going to say about them and have good relationships.

To the last point, I think it's important to have these conversations about advising needs fairly early on, because the reality of the situation is, is that we are in academia because we have advanced degrees in the discipline. We are not here because we were taught how to be effective teachers or advisors. There's professional development out there increasingly so, from our universities, but again, we are going into work because of the disciplinary knowledge that we have. People, in the absence of being trained about how to teach adults, or how to be an effective adviser, people are going based on their own experiences.

As a result, you could have faculty that are extremely well-intended and want to be supportive, but they only know the way that they were advised or what they didn't like when they were being advised. We're just going off of that. They don't know what they

don't know. Being able to communicate needs to communicate those expectations because that's where a lot of conflict often comes up. There's this discrepancy between what it is that you're expecting, and then what your advisor is expecting, and then conflict emerges, so having those conversations fairly early.

The point of community was brought up multiple times and how do you connect not only with other faculty or PIs in that department or discipline, but thinking more broadly around psychology and creating mentoring networks, that you have an advisor and the responsibility of-- Actually, before I even go to that, just because your advisor is assigned to you doesn't mean that they're going to be your mentor. I think it's an important distinction for students to understand as well, that mentoring, it's a relationship that both of you are going into that is beyond advising, because it does have the psychosocial aspects to it.

That advising, you have to have an advisor in order to matriculate through the program. There is no guarantee that this person even wants to or maybe really interested or expects to talk to you about some of the psychosocial aspects that we touched on throughout this conversation. I think it's important to get that clarity there. Then thinking about mentoring, not just relying on your advisor, either. Your advisor is one potential mentor, but it's having that board of directors, as I was taught, who are the individuals who can meet your different professional needs, because I think it's unrealistic to think that any one faculty member is going to be able to cover everything it is that you need.

Using your professional associations such as APA, I heard National Latinx Psychological Association brought up before. What are those professional spaces where you could cultivate a broader mentoring network?

**Sandra Gomez:** Yes. I was going to hop in and say that all those organizations, I think have mentoring networks that they manage people with. Also, I think sometimes, for me, getting closer to my advisor is knowing a little bit more about them. I think it depends on who your advisor is, but he leans more relational. I need to know a little bit about his own graduate experience and relationship with his mentor and advisor is also helpful for me to see how he advises me and what worked and what didn't. I think it depends on your advisors, and if they lean on the relational part or not. Luckily, that's how I work and then that's how I met my advisors also.

**Dr. Stith Butler:** Thank you so much, Sandra. Andrea, did you want to?

**Andrea Wiglesworth:** Yes. I put it in the chat, because I didn't know if we'd have time.

**Dr. Stith Butler:** I'll give you the last packet of the last question.

**Andrea Wiglesworth:** Response to this question still?

**Dr. Stith Butler:** Yes.

**Andrea Wiglesworth:** Okay. Just making sure.

**Dr. Stith Butler:** Oh, I'm sorry.

**Andrea Wiglesworth:** I want to really emphasize the importance of picking the end advisor that you think you are going to mesh well with, based on the interview phase, as much as possible. There are so many brilliant scientists in this field. There are so many wonderful programs. There are maybe more brilliant scientists and wonderful programs than there are kind scientists and kind program directors. You want to think, "Who do I really want to spend time with on a weekly basis for five-plus years?" Because depending on your goals, you are going to feel so much more enriched and able to do this work in that setting than you would in a really cold impersonal but great program or advising relationships.

I would honestly put that thought, the vibe that you get from your advisor and that relationship above these other ideas of prestige in selecting where you want to be, because that is what is actually going to motivate and sustain this work that you're doing. If you haven't already been thinking about it, I would really put that high up there while selecting programs, because any gut feeling you have interpersonally, that is valuable information for making these kinds of decisions.

**Dr. Stith Butler:** It's a wonderful advice. Thank you so much for sharing your perspectives on that and your experiences, incredibly helpful. I can't believe it's 1:57 Eastern Time. The hour went so fast. I want to thank you all for participating today, for giving us such great insights and information, and sharing your experiences. Just thank you. It's been a wonderful hour. Thanks to everyone for joining. I'm going to turn it over to Shandol to close this out.

**Shandol Hoover:** First, thank you so much to all of our panelists, and Adrienne, and thanks to everyone for the wonderful questions. It's always wonderful when these turn into discussions and conversations. We wanted to let you know that the event was recorded. We'll send a link to the recording to everyone who registered in about two weeks. About that same time, we'll also put on the website that I have on the screen here. If you've not already checked out these other sessions in the series, we encourage you to check that out and share with friends.

You will receive after this broadcast, a one-minute survey, we would love your feedback. Please let us know how we're doing. If you want to send us topics for the future, you can include them on that survey or you could also email us at [science@apa.org](mailto:science@apa.org) with your recommendations. We hope you all have a great day, and all the best. Thank you so much.