



AMERICAN  
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ASSOCIATION

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

### SESSION 1: TOP THINGS TO KNOW AS YOU APPLY TO GRADUATE SCHOOL (PRE-SESSION VIDEO)

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#### TRANSCRIPT

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**Dr. Mitch Prinstein:** Hi, everyone. My name is Mitch Prinstein, and I am serving as the Chief Science Officer at the American Psychological Association. I'm so excited to introduce you to this new series about how to become a psychological scientist. So many questions out there about how to successfully apply to graduate school and also a real need and importance for us to help diversify the field. That's what this series is going to look into.

We're going to walk you through step by step, the application process as you're going through it. We're going to talk today about top seven things you should know as you start the application process and go on and talk with you about your personal statement, how to interview successfully, select a program that's a good fit for you, or apply to post-bacc positions if you decide not to go this year, and also how to succeed in your first year if you get an offer in this round.

We are going to present this to you in a flip format, so you can watch these videos at your own leisure, they'll be relatively brief, then join us for a live Q&A webinar that we're going to host, so you can get more of your questions answered at each part of this series. Today's topic is going to be really focusing on these top seven things you might be thinking of early in the fall semester here as you're just starting the application process, including what kind of program you should apply to.

Does the field need your point of view? How will you be funded in graduate school? How will you decide where to apply? How do you keep track of all these application requirements and what should you expect? Should you be working on a resume or a CV right now in September or October? What do you do about the GREs?

Let's start by talking about what kind of programs there are. There are many different areas of psychological science, of course. Now, some of them, the ones that you might have heard the most about might have a practice component for people who go on to clinical counseling or school psychology or practicing psychological science in areas other than mental health, which is applied psychology.

One of those popular areas is industrial-organizational psychology. These are the ones you might have heard the most about. Comparing and contrasting those with other fields like social work and psychiatry, you can see here a brief description and a link for some other resources to learn about each of these areas. Even these areas with a practice component have a very deep science emphasis and you can learn a lot and become a psychological scientist in any of these areas.

Feel free to pause the screen if helpful to get more information. Also, there are many different areas that don't have a practice component and are essential for us understanding human behavior with all the various sub-disciplines of psychology. There are many, many more here than I could possibly list in just one slide but wanted to point out to you a variety of different ones, including developmental psychology, social, behavioral neuroscience, experimental, quantitative psychology, and cognitive psychology.

Again, if it's helpful, feel free to pause your screen and read a little bit about the differences between these different areas of psychological science, some different resources of where you can learn more about them, feel free to Google any of these divisions, and also an emphasis on not all of these areas are going to lead you to academia. They could, but there are also a variety of other areas that are really needing psychological scientists with these areas of expertise.

When you apply to graduate school, are you applying to a master's or a doctoral program? You actually have your choice. I should mention though that the vast majority of doctoral programs in psychological science are going to require you to do a master's thesis and earn a master's degree along the way. That means that you're probably applying straight to a doctoral program and the master's will just be one more hurdle or assignment that you'll do on the way to that doctoral degree.

There are also a variety of fantastic master's programs in psychological science that might be a really good idea for you if you're not sure yet what area of the field you're interested in, if you didn't get the GPA that you think is going to show off your best potential in undergrad, and you want to take some graduate coursework to demonstrate that you are in fact ready for a rigorous graduate program or some master's programs will even help you prepare your doctoral applications.

Does the field need your point of view? It absolutely does. This great data from the Center of Workforce Studies at APA, feel free to pause your screen and look this over in more detail if you'd like, but it will show you that today the average psychologist is a 50-year-old non-disabled white woman. Now, whether that describes who you are today or not, it demonstrates to you that there's lots of room for us to have many, many different perspectives because it is important that psychological science understands all human behavior.

That means that the biases, the emphasis, and the systemic barriers that have existed before that have led to a particular characteristic of how psychological scientists currently identify needs change and needs further development. Whoever you are in whatever way you

identify, we need your voice, we need your interests, we need your expertise, so we can truly understand all human behavior.

In the last few years, there have been some changes in the field. For instance, among those who graduated in 2019, you can see that now one-third of those who have graduated with a doctoral degree in psychology identify as a scholar of color, and approximately three-quarters or more identify as female.

When you apply to graduate school, you'll have the opportunity to think about how you're going to fund your time as a graduate student. You should know that the vast majority of doctoral programs in psychological science will waive your tuition. You will not be paying any tuition to go to school in most of these doctoral psychological science programs. In addition, you will get a stipend to help support your work as a full-time graduate student. Now, that stipend will come in a variety of different possible ways. For instance, you can get a stipend as a teaching assistant, which means that you're going to be helping to grade papers or teach some lectures or lab sections, or maybe even teach your own class as a TA. You might instead get a stipend for doing some work in an advisor's lab and helping them with their research studies. That's a research assistantship. Some schools might offer you a fellowship where you have no responsibilities at all as an assistantship, but you're getting money to support your graduate work.

You also can apply for a fellowship, and there are a variety of great fellowships you can apply for, but please do take a look at the NSF Graduate Research Fellowship which you can apply to while you're an undergraduate or in your first year or two of graduate studies, and that will help you to support your work as a top psychological scientist.

How do you decide where to apply? Once you know what kind of program you're interested in, then you're going to look at the different schools and the different mentors who work in that area of scholarship. Now, a lot of times people wonder, "Do I want to go to a school that has a fancy name or a great reputation? Do I want to go to a mentor that has a really well-known area of research or long history of scholarship?" Yes and no. Your academic pedigree does matter some. It's important to pay attention to those variables, but they're really quite misleading as compared to when you applied to undergrad.

The places that are really known as the top undergrad institutions may or may not be the places that are known as being the top areas for the area of psychological science, you're interested in. Just because a mentor is a senior or well-known member of the faculty doesn't mean that they're the best mentor for you. In fact, you probably want to instead look for someone who has a mentor style, who fits your area, your interests, and your way of working, and also someone who's still quite active and productive.

There are many, many junior as well as senior mentors who might fit one or both of those characteristics. You want to look quite broadly when you're deciding where and to whom you will apply. Getting into graduate school requires quite a number of activities that you're going to be engaged in and accumulating your records over the course of this fall.

You might take the GRE; more on that later. You might be asked to provide your GPA, maybe even your psychology course GPA.

You're going to be asked to write a personal statement, maybe a diversity statement, maybe a cover letter, a CV, a work sample perhaps, you'll be asked for letters of recommendation, and you might even interview. At this stage of the game, as you're searching for programs and mentors to apply to, it's really important that you jot down how each of the programs are asking you to submit this information, which information they want, and by what date because if you miss that deadline, you've missed out on applying to that school for this whole round.

It's really important as you're looking around at different schools and mentors to keep a good Excel file or documentation of exactly what's needed for whom by when and in what format. Electronically mailed, sent by you, sent by others. It's quite a cumbersome part of the application process. A good idea to take careful notes as you're looking around for programs at this stage of the game.

Also, early in the fall, you might want to start working on converting your resume into a CV. Now, it's okay if you submit a resume, but you should know that most folks in academia, you use a CV, which stands for curriculum vitae or course of life. Compared to a resume, a CV is a bit longer. In fact, it might go on for many, many pages. As an undergrad, don't worry if yours isn't more than a page or two, but it's okay to put lots of detail about the research studies that you might have helped working on, about honors or opportunities that you've experienced in the community or your school, about the different kinds of things that you're interested in. You can write that in paragraph form, even if relevant.

It's a little bit longer and more comprehensive than a resume. Luckily, you can find turns of examples on every faculty member's webpage, you'll likely find their CV. You can also look at that to borrow some different formatting styles and make sure that yours looks like a more academic CV as compared to a resume.

Now, what to do about the GREs? This is a really common question right now. It used to be that everybody took the GRE. Many people even took the psychology GRE, but the world is changing in a few different ways. For a couple of years, it was really hard to go and physically take the GRE because we were in lockdown. Also, it was a time of reckoning and awareness of the ways in which our application and evaluation process might have been creating or reinforcing systemic barriers that impeded our ability to diversify the field.

As a result, a number of programs have decided that they're continuing to experiment with not offering the GRE as a requirement and not requiring the GRE test, and instead, relying on other metrics as a way of determining your potential to succeed in graduate school. What do you do if you take the GRE but you're applying to a school that didn't ask for it? Well, you might not want to send it. Invariably there will be someone else who might send in theirs, who would have a higher score than yours. Frankly, this process of evaluating

folks on factors other than the GRE should be taken seriously. If a program hasn't asked you to send their scores, the majority of folks seem to not be sending their scores as a result, and sending yours might send a mixed message.

Stay tuned so you can hear more information about the upcoming series and also how to sign up for each webinar as it occurs. Thank you so much for joining and hope to see you again.