**Title: Strategies for Applying to Psychology Graduate School (Even During a Pandemic)!  
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**Garth Fowler:** Welcome. My name is Garth Fowler and I am one of the senior directors for the Center for Education in Psychology at the American Psychological Association. I am going to be your host for today's webinar, staying on track webinar entitled Strategies For Applying to Graduate School Even During A Pandemic. Today, we're going to go over some of the standard things you might want to think about when you're applying to graduate school but then we're also going to talk about some of the unique scenarios that are presented to us today.

Before we get started and before I introduce our guests, I am going to go over a little bit of some procedural things for you to keep in mind. We have close to 900 individuals registered for today's webinar. There'll be a lot of activity on the internet. If you experience any audio problems, if you experience any video problems, please close out of the application and log back in using your registration link.

I also highly encourage you to shut down any other applications you might have running in the background. If you have another web screen up, if you have email, and you can shut that down that will also help with the experience. Throughout the webinar though, you'll be hearing advice from our speakers. You can submit questions using the questions box off the dashboard. We will have time at the end to go over as many of the questions as possible.

As I mentioned before, we have close to 900 people signed up. If we don't get to your question, it's not because it wasn't important. It's just with a lot of people signed up, it will be hard to get through everything. You can download a copy of the handouts through the dashboard so that you can see what the slides are today. At the end of the webinar, there will be an email comes out in about a day.

It takes about a week but we'll also do a follow-up to that. You can go back to the original login page which I will put in our chat at the very end of the day and you can go and download the slides there again. There will also be a recording of the webinar so you can revisit the webinar again. Without much further ado, I'm going to allow my guests to introduce themselves, and then we'll jump right into today's presentation. Our first guest today is Jerry Kernes from University of La Verne. I'll let him introduce himself.

**Jerry Kernes:** Great, thank you very much, Garth, and welcome everyone. I'm glad everyone's here. I'm Jerry Kernes. I'm the Program Chair and Director of Clinical Training in the PsyD program at the University of La Verne which is located in southern California.

**Garth:** Our next guest will be Ana Franco-Watkins from Auburn University.

**Ana Franco-Watkins:** Welcome, everyone. My name is Ana Franco-Watkins. I'm Department Chair of Psychological Sciences at Auburn University.

**Garth:** Let's jump right in for the presentation. I'm going to start off by giving a brief overview of just the general process of applying to graduate school. This is going to be highlights of a popular series that I used to run, live webinars around the country at regional psychology meetings but of course, this year is really different. It's an actual those roadshows, for lack of a better word, are a version of a series of modular videos that you can view on-demand called *Finding Fit: A Roadmap to Graduate School.*

There's the link in the page right there. Later you can go and visit it. This series has been developed and brought to you by APA where we have a number of individuals that talk about the very different steps and stages of applying to graduate school. Everything from understanding all the different types of degrees and programs. Some of you may or may not know that we do an annual survey of graduate programs across the United States and Canada.

There are over 1600 graduate programs in psychology departments in schools and affiliated programs in the United States. That's a lot. Really, that webinar is to help you try and narrow down what would be the best ones for you. Other topics which I will touch on briefly today, things like what it takes to get in and we talk about getting in and getting through graduate school as opposed to just making sure you can get in. Graduate school is a very different experience in some ways from undergraduate education and training. There's another series of webinars called *How to prepare personal statements, letters of recommendation*.

You can go and watch all these on-demand through that link. What I'm going to do today is I'm going to try and give a brief highlights of those topics from each one of those modulars. I'm not going to dive deep into each one. It's because we really want to save time for our speakers to talk a little bit about what is different this year and maybe even moving forward and then have time to answer some of your questions. If you're having problem hearing, please try again, if you're having audio issues, try logging out and logging back in.

Like I said, we'll show you at the end of the webinar, but that was that link at the beginning where we'll be able to go over those modules, you'll see them in the slides when you download them. All right.

We're going to start off by talking about why would you go to graduate school? This is the question I always ask people when they come to me and they're talking about going to graduate school, I say, "I want you to think why you go to graduate school."

There's usually one of three things that you can think about. One is, maybe you're interested in what I call doing that disciplinary basic research that you want to be the person that establishes the knowledge base of psychology. How do we know behavior works this way? How do we know that memory does this thing? It's establishing those basic concepts. That actually was why I went to graduate school. I have a PhD in behavioral neuroscience.

I was always interested in the why. In my graduate training experience, I was taught how to do basic experiments, computations, and really working through literature so that in the end, I could do the why. Some people are interested in going to graduate school because they want to provide services. What they really want to do is they want to take that knowledge base that I was talking about before and bring it into certain spaces to help solve problems. They can do that in places like business and education and policy. One of the most commonly thought about places when we think about applying psychology to do service is that typical image that most people, your parents, your friends think of as psychology, the clinical or counseling psychologists. We call that the health service psychology. That's one reason why you might want to go to graduate school. Some people are actually in between those two ends if you think of as a continuum.

They want to engage in research and they went to improve how they might be doing that type of improve the process of what's our knowledge base? How do we apply things? They also want to see it being applied in these phases. You can think of this continuum, and people are somewhere along that. I tell people to answer that question before you start applying to graduate programs because that's how graduate programs could be broadly divided.

That you really need to ask yourself which programs are the best fit for me based upon that information. Essentially, programs also say look, our primary training goal is to create that scientist or our primary training goal is to create that applied clinical psychologist, our primary training goals that space in between, and it helps you then find what is a good fit. That's what actually happening here. You need to find a good fit by thinking about what that program will train you to do.

Then programs are trying through the application materials which we'll talk about a little bit, but it will go into greater depth in those modules. They need to try and find good fit too. They're asking you to submit things like the reason why they have a written essay or they'll ask about your research experience or about your volunteer experience. It's because they're trying to say, "Are you a good fit for what the program will teach you to do?"

Let's dive in a little bit to these different types of programs and give a little bit of background. I jumped ahead, sorry, we're having some slide issues. It's a little slow today. There we go.

Let's go into that first space that I was talking about, the disciplinary research training. These are mostly those programs. These programs mostly are PhD programs in psychology. There are a few that might have a master's degree. Our research shows though that mostly when you're interested in that very disciplinary field, it's going to be a PhD program. As I said before, the primary training outcome is to produce researchers that pursue very fundamental or critical questions. I like to tell people think about your professors sometimes like the people who run research labs or who are saying, "Why does this happen?" The broad subfields of psychology, some examples, this isn't inclusive, not all of them, but the broad subfields of psychology that we usually find these disciplinary programs in are like cognitive sciences and decision-making. That was, again, my program. Developmental psychology, social psychology, experimental psychology, those typically would be the types of subfields and programs where you're going to give, where you're going to receive that type of training.

Let's jump into our next which is the disciplinary professional practice and service. Here we also see that most of these programs when you're looking for the type of degree, they're usually either PsyDs or PhD programs. We do see a little more master's level degrees appear in this space, sometimes both masters of arts and masters of sciences. Still, the overwhelming number of programs are at the doctoral level so those PsyDs or PhDs, but you can find more in the master's space. Again, as I said, the primary training outcome is to provide that individuals that have those psychological services.

The most common in psychology are those health service psychology fields, which APA defines, this is an APA definition, as clinical counseling or school psychology. Other programs can also say, "We might not be clinical, but we do train primary service providers, forensic psychology programs, or things like that." You need to read the materials and see what they're talking about in terms of how they're training them. Those are the most common types of programs.

Let's go to our next one. Taking a second here. Slides are very slow, I apologize about that. There we go. Now we can talk about that other end, that very applied research application program. These again are predominantly PhDs, we do see some PsyDs degrees here. We are seeing some growth in masters of science programs in this space more recently, there's great opportunities for you out there. As I mentioned before the primary training outcome is to produce individuals to do research, apply psychological principles in many settings like business law. Again, some examples, not exclusive, some IO programs are in this space. I know some IO programs that are also very basic research. Don't just rely upon the subfield, you're going to have to ask questions. We'll get to this later about what do you train your program alumni to do? Where do you expect them to go? Forensic psychology, sports psychology are other examples within this space.

It's important again that you know all those questions and you think about that because all the materials and everything that they have designed around themselves, the programs designed around themselves are to try and make sure that you're a good fit. They want to ask questions about like, "Do you understand what we'll be training you to do?" That's why they have course requirements like they do. That also gets into the space of APA accreditation. I find sometimes that students need some help and we need to really clarify what APA accreditation really is.

Accreditation is a process that it's a voluntary process so because a program is accredited, they said that they were willing to go through this process in which the faculty there would say we want to have the APA and a subset of individuals that they help identify an Accrediting Commission. Come in and do a program review and establish does it meet certain quality criteria and benchmarks to receive APA accreditation?

Currently, the APA will only accredit programs, and what we call health service psychology. Remember, it's at the only programs at the doctoral level so only PsyDs, PhDs. In school, you might see EDS or some other educational specialist degree, but it's got to be a doctorate. You're not going to at the moment, see any accreditation at masters level programs. It's going to be in the fields of health service psychology. Again, that clinical counseling school psychology. Just because you see that a program isn't APA accredited doesn't mean it's not a good program. For example, my program was what we call outside the scope of accreditation. It was a cognitive behavioral neuroscience program at the University of Washington and there was no option for it to get accredited. That doesn't mean it was a bad program. It just meant it was outside the scope. Some programs haven't yet decided they want to go for that accreditation standards. Again, it doesn't mean it's a bad program, they just maybe are working up to it is a process.

It is important to remember though that if you want to be what we call a licensed service provider in psychology, so if you want to and the best story I can give is if you want to hang a shingle on your door and be that psychologist that provides clinical or counseling services or work in a school, many states require-- many states are the ones who give you that license to practice. It doesn't come from me. It doesn't come from the APA. It comes from your state. Many states will say in order to even be eligible to get a license, you must have graduated from an APA accredited program. If you're interested in that, and you know you're going to be working, say in California or New York, you want to know a little bit about what that licensing requirements were and make sure the program will get you prepared. A hint, programs will help you do that if you ask and say my intent is to do X, they could say, "Yes, we do have students who become accredited, or they go to the internship programs and things like that."

That's a big overview. I've created a little slide here. This comes from an online webinar series, again, a series of blogs where it's the roadmap. Here's a road sign that summarizes what we talked about. Again, if your interest is that disciplinary research training, it's most often going to be a PhD program. You're going to find examples and things like cognitive sciences, social personality, behavioral neuroscience. When it comes to APA accreditation, we say it's outside the scope. If you want to be the applied research professional trainings, you're in that in-between space. Again, lots of PhDs, sometimes the PsyDs, some master's programs, but not a lot. These programs, if they're clinical counseling or school, they will be inside the scope of accreditation and so you'll want to pay attention to that. If you're really interested in that very direct professional training, again PhDs and PsyDs are the most common degrees we see. There are gross at the masters level. Great examples of these good again, clinical counseling school, neuro-psych, all those spaces in there. Again, those programs that are doctoral level and that are in clinical counseling school are inside the scope of accreditation.

To summarize all this real quickly, what you need to do as an applicant is understand all these different degree options and areas of emphasis. It's because this is how you're going to say this program is a best fit for where I want to go. You need to understand what they're looking for, how they assess fit. They assess fit by having you answer questions, talk about your research experience, talk about your volunteer experience, or your community health experience. They want to know how well you understand what they're going to train you to do. Which means that you should have a very strong understanding and feel prepared to ask about what happens after graduation. What do students do? Do they become licensed? Do they get to be faculty members? Do they get to work in research labs? Do they get to work in that business space that you're interested in? That's how you're going to determine if you're a good fit for the program.

It's because programs are doing the exact same thing in reverse. They ask all these questions, they have course requirements because they want to make sure that you are prepared to do the training that they're going to take you through. They're looking for evidence that you have the necessary skills that you are prepared to receive. Some of them need to make sure that they have the right resources to support you. Do you have the right experience that they can help match you with a mentor? What project they're working on? What kind of CAs or RAs they have. They're doing the exact same thing in reverse. They're looking to make sure that you are a good fit. You really need to pay attention to the questions that they're asking, the information that they're asking you to go for, to submit. That's the overview of my presentation. I'm going to turn it over quickly to my first speaker, Jerry, and he's going to tell you a little bit about some things that have been happening in the space along this in this world because of COVID-19.

**Jerry:** Thank you very much, Garth. I'll be brief and touch on a couple of things that applicants can expect for this year. Change, certainly expect change and we on our various admissions committees in our various programs expect that change as well. We're aware that things are going to look different for our applicants. Some of the ways in which those applications may look a little different is that some institutions across the country have allowed their undergraduates to take courses pass and fail. Please know that if that applies to you, you're not alone, we expect that we may see some courses on your transcript that are taken with a pass or fail grade rather than a traditional letter grade. We know that that may impact your GPA and the GPA might be lower than expected this year. It's okay for that. I wouldn't want anyone to stress out unnecessarily so about having a pass or fail grade on their transcript. As long as it's a pass grade it's certainly acceptable.

As many people already know and my colleague later may talk about that a bit more in-depth. The GRE, there are certainly changes to a variety of ways in which programs are thinking about and utilizing the GRE this year. Many programs are waiving the GRE this year but not all programs are waiving the GRE. The most important thing that you can do is verify with each individual program that you're interested in what that program's approach is on the GRE. Some programs like my own program, we're utilizing the testing at home option but we also understand that sometimes when you're working at home, and as I'm working at home right now, I could have an interruption at any time unexpectedly. We understand that that's not necessarily the ideal testing environment. We expect some variation in GRE scores this year.

Also, what you should expect as a potential applicant is that what the various programs are able to offer you may likely be different than what those programs were able to offer in the past. From my own program, for example, there may be more limitations on the practica that you would do in the program, depending on how long our various universities are working in a remote environment, our partners, our clinical partners throughout our training area may be allowed to see patients on-site and some may be allowed to do telehealth, but some of those offerings may be curtailed completely.

In addition, extracurricular activities, certainly going to conferences, things that were great **[unintelligible 00:21:47]** builders in the past are going to be much less plentiful. We will understand that and seeing that in the applications that come our way. Similarly, a number of my colleagues have research labs, and those labs might have gone inactive for the time being or maybe restructured to be more limited than they would have been in the past. Garth, we can go to the next one.

What do you do with all that? How do you strengthen your application during this time? Communication is extremely important. One aspect of communication on your end as an applicant is to follow the prompts that are given to you. It's important to follow the instructions that you see in front of you because we've been thinking about various ways to help guide you through the application process. Simply going as far as that. If a prompt tells you this is what you need to do. You don't need to get creative about it. Follow those instructions. I would say that a way to strengthen your application as well is to acknowledge the pandemic. I personally expect to see that in the applications that I receive. If that isn't mentioned in some ways I'm going to wonder why that wasn't mentioned. Taking into consideration the context in which we are all swimming around in right now would be very important in strengthening your application.

Reach out to programs. I was looking at some of the questions that we had sent to us in advance and some of those questions were along the lines of I've been trying to reach different programs, but I haven't heard anything back. Programs may still be trying to figure out things and some of us are short-staffed unexpectedly. Some universities might have cut back on their administrative help and may not be able to get back to you as quickly as they once did. Please do reach out but also be patient and understand that we will get back to you. When I say we I'm talking about programs in general.

Garth indicated in the previous slides the importance of fit. Fit remains very important. I put a little caveat on here. The importance of fit does not go away because we're in a pandemic. Fit can also be kept in mind in terms of your grades and your scores and experiences, maybe fewer or may not reach the same level as you would have wanted them to. If you have the same training goals and interest as a program to which you're applying, that is still going to be seen in your application. I wouldn't recommend applying to programs that weren't a good fit for you. If you think that a program is a good fit, then don't let that limit you. Go ahead and take that opportunity.

All right, Garth, we can go the next one.

Interviewing during the pandemic. I probably should change this first bullet point, instead of saying online interviews are likely a possibility. I think it's almost a certain possibility at this point. For many of our programs, I don't see many programs doing any in-person interviews in the coming year. To do that, to do an online interview, it's important that you begin to work on your Zoom etiquette. I just chose Zoom as the provider, but it could be whatever provider the interview is being held through. Treat the interview as if you were there in person. Make sure that you are on time, make sure that you've checked out any technical difficulties in advance, and try to set up your Zoom environment as much as you possibly can. If you know that you have a distracting environment for interview day if you could somehow go to a friend's house or go to some other place. I know we're not supposed to be in contact with someone that is in your approved zone of social distance etiquette, I would recommend doing that.

Be prepared given this climate that we're in. Be prepared to discuss how the pandemic impacts you, both personally and professionally. All of us are impacted in a variety of ways. I would say that you should anticipate questions along those lines in your interview. Talk about though what you did to overcome the challenges that you faced. We expect that people are challenged by all of this, but how have you been able to try to establish a new normal or a new way of doing things? Talk about how you structure your day? I saw that as one of the questions as well. How do I structure my day? If you're not currently structuring your day, that's a good thing to start thinking about. How can I structure my day to make it look like as much of a normal work environment as possible?

Then also, you should anticipate questions about what you've learned about yourself during this pandemic. What are some things that you've learned that are growth areas? I've had some people that I've been talking with recently realize that they really have a great need for activities and extraversion. I've had others who realize, "Gosh, I might be a lot more introverted than I ever believed myself to be." Being able to talk about those lessons or life lessons that you've learned is helpful.

Also, don't forget that although we're in one pandemic in terms of the COVID, there are other pandemics that are layered on top of that. Given the climate that we're in now, be prepared to discuss diversity issues and the intersection of those diversity issues with the pandemic that the COVID pandemic that we're in as well. With that in mind, I'll give some time to my colleague, Dr. Franco-Watkins to share her part.

**Ana:** Thank you, Jerry. It is a mouthful to say Dr. Franco-Watkins. My students struggle with it too, so it's normal.

**Jerry:** Thank you.

**Ana:** I appreciate everything that Garth and Jerry have provided for you so far. I would just probably touch on a few points that complement what has been stated so far and based on the questions that we had some preview to. There were quite a few questions about what would admissions look like this year. For the most part, based on my own institution, and being part of a network of chairs and heads of graduate programs, COGDOP, nationwide, it appears that we are going to operate as normal, which means that we'll most likely be accepting the same number of students that we traditionally do. It is best to check on the institutions because some may have some differences, or there may be differences in funding.

In the past, many institutions could fully support X number of students. That might be reduced if some students had to stay on a little longer, they have to continue to support. Those are some things to consider while you're thinking about graduate programs, but I suspect, for the most part, it will be pretty normal. It's still a good time to be applying and going to grad school. Even though some of the students, especially who have done behavioral work were stalled, especially in March. We as professors, students, institutions have come up with creative ways to make sure our students still continue to make progress towards the milestones and not be delayed. Even if you tend to or will be entering grad school, and it still might not be completely normal, I hope it will be. In the event that it won't, we're better prepared to help to accommodate students so that you can continue to make progress and reach your milestones.

As my colleagues have mentioned, the GRE is one of the things that is very different this year from taking it at home to having a lot of schools that are waiving them, or making them optional.

For instance, at my institution, we have five graduate programs, three doctoral, two masters in my department, and we have waived completely the GRE and actually will not be part of the application process and the spreadsheet that we get. Speaking to other colleagues across the nation, it's very common that most of them have gone to a waiver or optional, and the option is truly optional. It'll be up to the student.

There isn't an advantage, or there shouldn't be to actually giving your GRE versus not because it's comparing apples and oranges across folks, because some people will have information, some won't. I think most programs are really committed to not considering the GRE as heavily in the application process and looking at a holistic view of the application. That means we're having discussions about how to best review and the rubric.

In the past, things may have been more timely, and as my colleague said, be patient because it may take a little longer to review all the applications. If the GRE isn't part of that institution's or program's consideration, they're coming up with different ways to provide a fair and equitable review of the applications. Then the last thing I just want to touch on was gaining experience during COVID, many of you are concerned about not having the ability to do what you had planned to do, especially for in-person experiences. I would just suggest that you may want to explore remote or virtual options.

For instance, you can do research. It may not be behavioral, but perhaps if there's an opportunity for a literature review, or data analysis, or gathering instruments, and surveys or different things that you can do for either a grad student or a faculty member to just make sure you're staying abreast of research, explore internships that may have remote possibilities. Some that are more research or data-driven have the ability to still continue internships, and it's much harder for the professional services side. I do acknowledge that.

I agree that you should address in your letter any gaps that you have in your experience because of COVID-19. It's critical and I think that programs, institutions, expect this will be very challenging for students and will be more understanding.

**Garth:** One applicant writes and says, "Well, what if one of the researchers I want to work with said they're not accepting students this year into the program? Is it okay to still apply to that program? What should the person do in that scenario?" Both Jerry and Ana, what is your thoughts on that scenario? A student has identified a particular professor they want to work with, but because of the current situation, they said they won't be taking students for the next year.

**Jerry:** Well, I think that and I apologize if I'm jumping in and not sure if **[unintelligible 00:34:03]**

**Garth:** Go ahead.

**Jerry:** Great. I think it depends. Again, it depends on what you want in that training. To go back to some of those early slides that Garth talked about. If working with a particular professor on a particular project in a particular area is really what you want and the direction that you want to go in, if that is where you've narrowed your focus, then it makes sense to wait until that professor is able to open up that professor's lab again and that might be a year or two or further down the line.

If you are more wanting to just get into graduate school and get into a particular program in which that professor works, then it might be possible to work with that individual in some other ways down the line, and not necessarily delay jumping in. I think it really comes back again to that question of what is it that you're looking to do.

**Ana:** I agree with Jerry, that it really does depend what you're willing to do. If you're willing to be flexible, look at perhaps other colleagues in the same department. For instance, students have been contacting me recently about whether or not I'm going to be taking students for the next year. I'm lower priority in my program right now for students just because of the number of students I have. I'm honest with them and say it's unlikely, however, my colleagues will be. If you're willing to be flexible, then perhaps it may not have been your first choice but it could be your second choice, and it still could be a very viable option as well.

**Garth:** Those are really great. Here's another question. It's not specific about the current scenario. What is the probability of getting into say, a master's or a doctoral program in psychology if you weren't an undergraduate psychology major? Whoever wants to jump in? Ana, why don't you go first since Jerry went first last time? What would your answer be to that?

**Ana:** I think it will depend on the program. It'll also depend on what your major was. For instance, in my institution, we have in a different college Human Development and Family Studies. That is very similar in many ways to psychology, especially developmental psychology. That would be completely appropriate to be in a different discipline, or industrial-organizational psychology, you may have been a business major, and with a psychology minor, that would also be appropriate.

If you're unsure, I would contact someone just to see but also address it in your letter of intent, or your personal statement, why you're making that transition, and how you're prepared because somebody may have a question that if you answer it in your personal statement, it'll go a long way so that they can see why you're making a change at this moment.

**Garth:** One of another questions that I saw coming in was and Ana, I think this is something you had talked about that a lot of departments are waiving the requirements across all their programs for GREs. What if you have taking them and you think they're good or strong? This someone asked what's your recommendation? Should you still submit the scores even if they're not required?

**Ana:** I guess that would depend. If they're waived completely, that means they're not looking at them that year but if it's optional, and it's strong, and you think it helps you, it doesn't hurt to add it in. It may be hard for people to review someone who doesn't have GRE scores compared to yourself. GRE scores is just one small part of the application. The fit, as my colleagues have said, is the best indicator of your experiences, your fit, and how you portray that in your personal statement or letter of intent, whatever the program calls it, is going to be much more critical per se than the GRE at this moment.

**Garth:** I think that's a wonderful lead into another question, which is, and I think you and I, we can both talk about this. I think, unfortunately, Jerry lost connection. Hopefully, he'll be able to join us again. One person wants to know, just what makes for a competitive application? Is it better to talk about teaching experience or volunteer hours or your research experience? I'll take a first stab at saying this and then Anna if you have anything that you want to add. Again, I think it goes back to fit.

If you remember those earlier slides, for example, some of those more disciplinary research programs, they're going to want to hear more about your teaching experience, if you have any, because sometimes that's how they'll fund their graduate students by giving them TA experiences or they may even require it because again, there was this idea that they're preparing you possibly to be future professors, and they'll want to hear more about your research experience. Whereas if you're interested say more in one of the applied settings like you want to go into some kind of combined forensics or other type of program. Ana, you might be a great person to talk about this because I wonder about this in IO psychology. They want to probably hear more about maybe your work experience and how you're going to want to bring your training into that experience. Really, the best competitive application isn't a generic one. It's understanding how to tailor your responses and understanding what they're going to prepare you to do to say, this is why I'm ready to come to your program. Ana, what's your take on that? What's your response to what makes the most competitive application?

**Ana:** I completely agree with you, it's aligning your own personal experiences and where you want to be with what the program values. That alignment has to be evident because they're trying to find the people who will best be successful within how their program is structured. Aligning is very important. If it's in terms of IO psychology, if it's a master's program, then the personal work experience might be much more important.

If it's a doctoral program, depending on the program, ours here is much more research-intensive so the research experience is more important. Usually, by going to the program websites, you can figure out what they emphasize. Then try to write your letter to also support and align with those, assuming that's what you really want to do. It's hard to sometimes align if it's not really what you want to do. That might be an indication that perhaps it's best to look for a different program that really aligns with your intentions and values. I think Jerry's back.

**Garth:** Yes, I was going to say so. Yes, Jerry's back. I don't know, Jerry, if you got to hear the question. They were asking what makes for the best competitive application. Ana and I had said it depends on how you align what you want to do with the fit of the program. Anything that you would like to add to that?

**Jerry:** Yes, certainly, making sure that you research a program and understand what that program is about, and then communicate your fit with that program I think is the most important thing that you can do in your application.

**Garth:** Another question that we have coming is, and Jerry, this might be a good space for you is question's the difference between PhD and PsyD programs. Specifically, there's two questions that have come up, but these are the themes that have been coming up. One is, how do you know if a PhD or a clinical program, be it the PsyD or a PhD program, is really more of that focus of health care professional preparation versus maybe a combined? They want to do research and also get that experience? How would you learn that? How do you find that out when you're researching your programs?

**Jerry:** A good question, Garth. I think that it's important to research a little bit because not all PsyD programs are the same. I don't think an applicant should make an assumption that a PsyD program does not involve research. Some PsyD programs certainly do involve research and try to include that throughout their program. How would you know that? Look at the curriculum if some of these programs are going to put their curriculum online. If you're seeing a lot of statistics courses and research methods courses embedded in a PsyD program's curriculum, they may be including research more than some other PsyD programs might.

Also, look at the program's webpage and look at the faculty who seem to be designated as core faculty for that PsyD program. If those faculty members have research labs, then most likely research is going to be incorporated into the clinical skills that the students are learning. Certainly, ask questions of the program. You can certainly ask about how much is research integrated into the PsyD program? Is this a traditional PsyD program that is more practitioner-based, or is this a PsyD program that is more of a scholar-practitioner program? Usually asking the administrative heads of the program are a good strategy for trying to get at the heart of that question.

**Garth:** Excellent. Ana, do you have any comments on that too, or?

**Ana:** That's not my area of specialty, but I know our clinical program is very research-intensive. They're looking for grad students that share that passion.

**Garth:** Again, I think the advice is go back and read what those requirements are for the program on their website, understand the types of questions, and like Jerry said, you ask because there is a broad diversity. Some programs might be very research-oriented, some might be more practice-oriented. Here's another great question I love and I can cite some statistics for people on this, but then I'd love to hear both your opinions again.

Can you go to doctoral program straight from an undergraduate, or do you have to get a master's degree? If so, what should you get it in? I will find this out, and I'll hunt this out later and try and put this in the chat, but our Center for Workforce Studies has done a lot of analysis of the pathways to graduate school. You can actually Google this. If you just Google "APA Center for Workforce Studies data tools," they have a wonderful site of interactive data tools. One of the tools talks about the pathway to graduate school.

Their research have shown that surprisingly, of all the people in the United States right now who have doctoral degrees in psychology, and this is looking over like the last 20 years. People who've had it for one year, people who've had it for 19 years. Only about 4% of those individuals that were undergraduates got a bachelor's degree will apply straight to a doctoral degree. People do it, but it is a small number. In psychology, there seems to be a larger prevalence of individuals going to a master's program first.

Our research shows that they don't always go to a psychology master's program. They might apply in some other field, a business program or social work, or a quantitative math-based program. Then they'll apply to the doctoral program of their choice. The answer is that there's a lot of different pathways. I don't think it's a requirement, but I'll let our two panelists respond to does having the master's degree make you more competitive or not and how to think about those particular scenarios. Who wants to go first on that one?

**Ana:** I can go. It actually will not matter if you have a master's or not, or you take a gap year, or you go straight from undergrad because I think the application process is a great equalizer. We look at just everyone at the same time. It's really about the fit again. Some people go to master's program. For instance, myself, I did a master's program before I did doctoral because I wasn't sure which area I would want to do. I was vacillating between cognitive and social psychology.

I ended up in decision-making, which is probably a combination of both, but it helped me prepare for what I wanted to do and explore options before I committed to a doctoral program. Then I went on to a doctoral program. For some people, you may need a little bit more experience or preparation or want to test different waters, and general master's program may help you with that. Some people are really ready right away, and they know what they want and which programs align with what they're looking for and are ready to apply.

Then some people just get a little tired, it's a lot of schooling stray. They want to take a gap year or two in order so that they can prepare. Maybe they want some professional or practical experience. Especially if the program emphasizes that and they may not have had a chance to obtain it while undergrad. It really depends. As Garth says, there's no one direct pathway. In our programs across my department, we've seen every combination of what I've just stated.

**Jerry:** That is our experience as well. It does not matter on our end whether you come right out of an undergraduate, or you've taken some time to explore some other paths and avenues. That application process is indeed a great equalizer. Our own internal data shows that most of our applicants take almost two years between their undergraduate and their doctoral program. At least our applications, we don't receive a tremendous number of people who have done the master's degree in between. Those who might have done a master's degree in between, I think to go back to the application process explaining what you learned during that master’s process and the reasons for pursuing that master's degree. That's more important for me to read than the actual master's degree itself.

**Garth:** Excellent. Well, I think we have time for one last question as we start to wrap up here. This is a really good question. It's probably more just talking about the future but one of our applicants said, “What do we as the panelists think is going to happen two years from now, three years from now? Do we think that these changes and impacts that we talked about due to the current year's situation are going to be temporary? Or do we think graduate training like the waiving of GREs will be a long-term impact?" I don't know if I really have an answer. I do have a thought but I'd like to hear from both of you first.

Any thoughts on what we think will happen say--? Some of the people on the webinar, they're juniors this year, so they're not going to be applying this year. They’re looking at next year. What do we think is going to happen in two years if anything?

**Jerry:** I would say and I'll try to be brief. I would say that things are never going to be the same again as they were and I don't mean that in a scary negative way. We are entering a new normal and we have to establish new norms. In the next couple of years, the profession and all our various training programs are going to figure out what those new norms are like. Some of the process and some of the standards that have worked in the past will continue to work in the future. Some things we all as a collective training organization are still going to need to figure out a little bit and are working as rapidly as we can to help figure those things out.

**Ana:** I'm going to agree with my colleague. It will be somewhat similar but there will be changes that will continue. Prior to the pandemic, we're already having discussions as department chairs of graduate programs about the utility of the GRE and how it is used. Those discussions were happening before students couldn't take the GRE at the same way that they could. I think we're going to continue those discussions and I know in my department we're going to assess after this year whether or not we're going to continue to waive it or whether we bring it back. These are things that I think nationally we're all having conversations.

Once you change and adapt, do you go back to something or is that new way that you changed and adapt much better and you want to move forward with that? These are key questions. A little uncertain in which direction we will be going but I think there's already some momentum for change in terms of GRE, in terms of incorporating more telehealth and virtual creativity in order for grad students to be able to achieve their goals, which is graduating and being successful.

**Garth:** I agree. Like you said before, I've been working with programs just on more holistic admission approaches to begin with before this. I think this may be act as a motivator for departments and programs to address some of these issues sooner. I think one thing that we'll see at least in the near future we'll be interviewing. There was a large trend for interviewing to go online anyways, and so I do think we'll see more programs. Maybe they'll have in-person interviews again, but they might do a prescreening interview where they'll ask for a half-hour to meet with you or talk with you.

I see some of these changes staying but to say exactly which ones, that will be hard. I think only the future will be able to tell us so. Well, with that, I am going to wrap us up and I'm going to first by taking the opportunity to give our guests here. I want to thank them for coming. Thank you both, Jerry and Ana, for your time today. It was a pleasure having you and I hope you enjoyed it.

**Ana:** Thank you.

**Jerry:** Yes, thank you, Garth. It was definitely a pleasure.

**Garth:** Thank you. I'm going to put in the website in the group chat here. You can go later to the Staying On Track website. It's really simple if you just Google "Staying On Track APA" but it is this website. What you'll be able to do is in the future once APA has completed the process, we’ll be able to convert this into recording and put the slides on the website here. It really is just putting it right here, pages.apa.org/staying-on-track. You can also find all the past recordings of the entire Staying On Track series.

One that's in there, which I think would be very helpful now in hindsight was we did one very early when the pandemic had shut down campuses on how to prepare to do your dissertation remotely. Honestly, as I think about that, it really was how to prepare to do anything professionally over Zoom. If you get asked to do a Zoom interview, you can go there and see some of the advice that we have on how to get ready, how to set up your space, and the things that Jerry was talking about.

Also, you'll be getting an email in a day or so informing you that you can always come back to the page and get the slides and stuff there. Without any further do, I'm going to thank you all for joining us today. Good luck and best of luck with your graduate application.