Considering Graduate Study

Psychology is a broad scientific discipline bridging the social and biological sciences. Psychology’s applications include education and human development, health and human resilience, family and community relations, organizations and other work environments, engineering and technology, the arts and architecture, communications, and political and judiciary systems.

There are many types of graduate programs in psychology. Selecting a graduate program that is best for you requires thoughtful consideration. The American Psychological Association (APA) does not rank graduate programs in psychology. Rather, APA encourages selecting graduate programs based on the best match for you. Some programs focus on preparing students for an academic research career, while others focus on preparing students for applied research outside the university. Other programs prepare students to provide psychological services as licensed professional psychologists. Some programs offer professional development, in addition to a focus in psychology, to prepare students for a college teaching career. Psychology subfields of recent master’s and doctoral graduates are illustrated in Figures 1 and 2.

**Programs, Degrees, and Employment**

Although employment in research, teaching, and human service positions is possible for those with a master’s degree in psychology, the doctoral degree is considered the entry-level degree in psychology for the independent, licensed practice of psychology as a profession. The doctoral degree is the preferred degree for college and university faculty, and it has long been a requirement for faculty positions in research universities. For specific information about employment outcomes of a program’s graduates, review the section entitled “Employment of Department Graduates” in each listing in this publication.

Figures 3 and 4 summarize the types of postdegree outcomes of graduates of master’s and doctoral degree programs. Nearly one fourth of those awarded a baccalaureate degree in psychology
continue in graduate or professional education in psychology or other fields.

Doctoral programs differ in the type of doctoral degree awarded. The two most common doctoral degrees are the PhD (Doctor of Philosophy) and the PsyD (Doctor of Psychology). Programs in colleges of education may offer the EdD (Doctor of Education) degree. The PhD is generally regarded as a research degree. Although many professional psychology programs award the PhD degree, especially those in university academic departments, these programs typically have an emphasis on research training integrated with applied or practice training. The PsyD is a professional degree in psychology (similar to the MD in medicine). Programs awarding the PsyD typically emphasize preparing their graduates for professional practice. About two thirds of all doctoral degrees in psychology are PhDs; of the degrees awarded in clinical psychology, about the same percentage receive PhDs as PsyDs. For more information about degrees, employment, and salaries in psychology, visit the APA Center for Workforce Studies website (http://www.apa.org/workforce).

Accreditation in Professional Psychology

Accreditation is the mechanism by which students and the public are assured the general quality of the education provided has met a set of educational and professional standards. Accreditation bodies include those that review and accredit at the institutional level and those that accredit at the program or area level. Institutions that confer advanced degrees (i.e., colleges, universities, and professional schools) are eligible for accreditation by regional accrediting bodies. The APA Commission on Accreditation (CoA) accredits at the program level and only reviews doctoral programs in regionally accredited institutions. The CoA accredits doctoral programs in professional psychology (e.g., clinical, counseling, school, combinations of these areas), as well as internship and postdoctoral residency programs. The APA CoA does not accredit master’s degree programs. Accreditation by the APA CoA applies to educational programs (i.e., doctoral programs in professional psychology), not to individuals. The APA CoA is currently phasing out accreditation of programs in Canada. Beginning on September 1, 2015, the APA CoA will no longer accredit programs in Canada. This follows several years of discussion and is based on an agreement with the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA). The CPA has their own accreditation system for programs in Canada. Doctoral programs accredited by the APA or the CPA are required to make publicly available information about the education and training outcomes of their students so that prospective students can make informed decisions. Please refer to the section entitled “Accreditation Status” in a department’s entry for the URL to locate the information for a specific program.

Graduation from an accredited institution or program does not guarantee employment or licensure for individuals, although being a graduate of an accredited program may facilitate such achievement and is required in some jurisdictions.

All programs listed in this publication are, at a minimum, situated in regionally accredited institutions. The doctoral programs that are APA-accredited are identified as such. For more information and the most current lists of accredited programs, see the APA Office of Program Consultation and Accreditation website (http://www.apa.org/ed/accreditation).

Doctoral Internship Training in Professional Psychology

Doctoral programs that prepare their graduates for the professional practice of psychology, especially in health service provision, typically require a doctoral internship prior to the awarding of the doctorate. The doctoral internship consists of 1 year (or the equivalent) of full-time supervised practice training. The internship is completed in a professional service agency training program that is typically not affiliated with the student’s graduate program. Internship programs vary widely in terms of the settings and populations served as well as their models of training. Students sometimes relocate geographically to complete their internships. All accredited internship programs select students through a nationwide computerized matching process that has a standardized application and fixed deadlines administered by the Association of Psychology Postdoctoral and Internship Centers (APPIC). For many years the number of available internships has not grown at the rate the number of students has, resulting in an imbalance in which large numbers of students do not successfully match to an internship (e.g., 17% in 2013). While efforts are underway by the APA and the education and training community to address this, the imbalance is a significant issue facing professional psychology education and training. To learn more about the match and internships in professional psychology, refer to the website of APPIC at http://www.appic.org.

Internship match rates for professional psychology doctoral programs can be found under the specific institution listing in this book. Figure 5 shows the percentage of graduate students who were matched to an internship and the internship placement type for APA-accredited doctoral programs and nonaccredited programs.

![Figure 5. Internship Placement by Program Type: 2011–2012](chart)

Admission Requirements

Requirements for admission vary from program to program. Some psychology programs may require significant undergraduate coursework in psychology, often the equivalent of a major or minor, while others do not. Seventy percent of recent psychology PhD recipients have also received a bachelor’s degree in psychology.

Of the graduate departments listed in this publication that offer master’s degrees, 80% require the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) Verbal and Quantitative sections and 6% require the GRE-Subject (Psychology). Ninety-seven percent of the doctoral programs listed require the GRE-Verbal and Quantitative sections, 13% require the GRE-Subject (Psychology). If the programs in which you are interested require these standardized tests, you should take the GRE-V, GRE-Q, and GRE-Subject (Psychology) in time for the scores to be included with your application materials. (As of August 2011, the GRE General Test implemented a new scoring system with scores ranging from 130 to 170.) The scores below are reported on both the new and old (200 to 800 point) scales. The overall median GRE scores reported for applicants admitted to master’s degree programs listed in this publication are GRE-Verbal: 154 (new)/510 (old); GRE-Quantitative: 150 (new)/591 (old); and GRE-Subject: 682. The overall median GRE scores reported for applicants admitted to doctoral degree programs listed in this publication are GRE-Verbal: 158 (new)/577 (old); GRE-Quantitative 154 (new)/668 (old); and GRE-Subject: 686.

Other criteria considered as admission factors may include previous research activities, work experience, relevant public service, extracurricular activities, letters of recommendation, statement of goals and objectives, an interview, a major or minor in psychology or a record of specific courses in psychology, and undergraduate GPA. Figure 6 shows the ratings of importance of these other admissions criteria by master’s and doctoral programs listed in this publication. A rating of 3 indicates that the individual admissions criterion is considered to be of high importance, while a rating of 0 indicates that the admissions criterion holds no importance in a program’s admissions process. The three admissions criteria rated as of highest importance for both master’s and doctoral programs are letters of recommendation, a statement of goals and interests, and undergraduate GPA. The overall median undergraduate GPA reported for applicants admitted to master’s degree programs listed in this publication is 3.5, while that for doctoral programs is 3.63.

The number of graduate school applicants typically exceeds the number of student openings. The number of applications received by a program and the number of students accepted provide a sense of the expected competition when applying to a particular department, program, or school. Figure 7 shows the percentage of students admitted in relationship to the number of applications for psychology programs in different areas. For more information, review the section entitled “Student Applications/Admissions” for each of the programs of interest to you listed in this publication.

Application Information

An application to a department or program of study is a very important document. Always confirm (a) the deadline for filing the application, (b) what documents are required, and (c) who should receive the application. Include the required application fee.

Most graduate programs in psychology accept students only for fall admission. However, if you are interested in winter, spring, or summer admission, check the application information listed in this publication for the program to which you are applying. Information about application deadlines in this publication is listed in the section entitled “Application Information.”

Time to Degree

Programs should be clear about the average number of years in full-time study (or part-time equivalent) required to complete the degree requirements. On average, graduate students take 6 years from entrance into a graduate program to complete the
doctoral degree. Eighty percent of recent psychology PhD recipients also have master’s degrees.

**Tuition and Financial Assistance**

Graduate education can be expensive. Figure 8 shows the average in-state and out-of-state public university and private university tuition rates for master’s and doctoral level programs in psychology.

Many students require loans to pay for their graduate education. The amount of debt incurred by doctoral students can be significant, as illustrated in Figure 9.

Financial assistance in various forms is available to students. You can apply for a fellowship, scholarship, assistantship, or another type of financial assistance. Many fellowships and scholarships are grants that do not require service to the department or university. Of departments and programs listed in this publication, 68% indicate that they offer some form of fellowship or scholarship to 1st-year students, and 67% indicate that they offer some form of fellowship or scholarship to advanced students. Assistantships in teaching and research are also available in many programs. These are forms of employment for services in a department. Teaching assistantships may require teaching a class or assisting a professor by grading papers, acting as a laboratory assistant, or performing other such supporting work. Research assistants ordinarily work on research projects being conducted by program faculty. Among the departments and programs reporting for this publication, 76% indicate that they offer teaching and research assistantships to 1st-year students and 85% report offering teaching and research assistantships to advanced students.

The amount of work required for fellowships, assistantships, and traineeships is expressed in hours per week. Stipends are expressed in terms of total stipend for an academic year of 9 months. Students should inquire, when receiving an offer of financial assistance, as to the amount to be given in terms of tuition remission (not requiring the student to pay tuition) versus a stipend (actual cash in hand).

For information about tuition costs and the types of assistance offered by departments and programs, review the section entitled “Financial Information/Assistance” for the programs of interest listed in this publication. You can review information listed on the APA Education website (http://www.apa.org/ed/graduate) for information about scholarships, fellowships, grants, and other funding opportunities.

The summary information presented in this introduction is based on the responses provided by the graduate programs listed in this publication. This information is not exhaustive in that a number of graduate programs in the United States and Canada are not listed in this publication and not all programs listed provide complete information to all questions. For this reason, you should look closely at the information provided by a specific program of interest to you and not rely exclusively on the group averages presented in this introduction.

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