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APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL

APPLYING FOR FUNDING

SHOULD I APPLY?

- You do not have to apply immediately after your undergraduate work
 - Graduate school is a HUGE commitment (so is the application process)
 - Completion of a programme takes time (approximately 7 years for the PhD including the MA)
 - you will not have a luxurious life style*
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WHAT TYPES OF PROGRAMMES ARE AVAILABLE?

1. Psychology (MA & PhD): experimental versus clinical.
 2. Psychology: professional schools (PsyD) – less of a research focus.
 2. Related fields: Social Work (MSW), Counselling Psychology (MEd, Ed.D), Psychiatry (MD), Family Studies, Criminology, Industrial Relations, Epidemiology
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WHERE DO I GET INFORMATION ON DIFFERENT PROGRAMMES AND THE APPLICATION PROCESS?

The internet – Each specific Graduate Program should have its own site

Start with Dr. Susan Murtha's website

http://www.psych.yorku.ca/smurtha/courses/4000/index_4000.html which has all the links on it plus a useful 12-page guide

List of Psychology Departments in Canadian Universities:


<http://www.cpa.ca/students/resources/canadianuniversities>

APA Publishes Annual Handbook: "Graduate Study in Psychology and Related Fields" containing descriptions of grad programs in Canada and USA, degree requirements, application info, student info, admission requirements, and more
-copy is held on reserve in the Resource Center, 162 BSB

THE FOUR MAIN COMPONENTS TO THE APPLICATION

1. Transcript
2. GRE scores
3. Letters of Reference
4. Your Personal Statement as to Why You Want to Go To Graduate School (usually called the “Letter of Intent”)

WHAT COURSES SHOULD I TAKE?

- If you follow the Honours Program requirements, you will qualify for the Graduate programs in Psychology (in this province and most others)
 - DO check each program individually to see what they require/prefer
 - **HOWEVER:** Clinical programs in Psychology are much more specific about what they want to see
 - For instance, often want to see that students took two courses (3.0 credit) with focus on understanding behaviour from different perspectives (i.e., biological, cognitive-affective, social, or individual)
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DO I NEED TO TAKE PSYCH4000/4001?

- Assessors will look at your research interests and experience, and the research potential you have
- Conducting your own piece of research will provide experience , will help you figure out your interests, how well you can do the research, and will speak to your potential as a researcher
- Psych4000 may better help you speak to your research experience and interests; however, you might manage to say enough about the focus of your research project if you wind up taking the psych4170 instead


INDEPENDENT RESEARCH PROJECT & YOUR APPLICATION

- The key is to actively think about the type of research you want to do in graduate school and express this in a clear and concise manner in your application
- Assessors are alert to research interest and are impressed by applicants who give a detailed and informed presentation of their research experience/interests
 - Feel you're lacking experience? Volunteer in a lab!
- Possible Advantage to Psych4000: Working closely with a Faculty member in Psych4000 may win you a more impressive letter of reference...

WILL FIELDWORK IMPROVE MY CHANCES?

- Not a great deal
 - Grades, GREs, letters of reference, and signs of research potential expressed in your personal statement are much more important
 - Assessors know that students with strong research potential can become interested/strong practitioners → but the reverse is not necessarily true
 - Key is to convey *research potential* through various experiences
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WHY DO I HAVE TO WRITE THE GRE???


- It is an attempt to get an academic index of academic prowess without contamination of subjective grading schemes at various institutions
 - It is an American Standardized Test....
 - While it is a point of contention and controversy among faculty at Canadian Universities, many graduate schools require it
 - General notion is that more emphasis is placed on the General vs. Subject scores (but no evidence supports this, and this point can vary with each assessing Faculty member's personal opinion)
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MORE INFO ON THE WRITING THE GRE


- For details and tips, see the Honours Student website:

<http://www.yorku.ca/health/psyc/PsychologyHonoursstudent.html>

WHAT KIND OF GRADES DO I NEED?

- To an extent, will depend on the institution and program
 - On average, to apply to a non-clinical psychology program you will need an overall B+ average to be competitive
 - For a clinical program, you will need an overall A average and above to be competitive
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GRADES IN LAST TWO YEARS

- Yes, many schools will calculate your GPA from your last full 10 courses (60 credits)
 - BUT: Do not rely on these grades alone. This is risky because :
 - a) graduate programs may not get your final-year grades in time to evaluate your application with (especially your last semester grades in fourth year)
 - So make sure to work hard to earn those reference letters because while your grades may not make it in time, your performance will be reflected in your letters!
 - b) Grades in upper-year courses tend to be higher among applicants; so assessors are especially impressed if you have high grades in lower years too
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HOW IMPORTANT IS THE PERSONAL STATEMENT?

- Fairly important
- Will be the assessor's first point of contact in many cases, and will help determine whether you are selected for an interview
- May also be the only direct contact with you in cases where an interview is not feasible

WRITING THE PERSONAL STATEMENT

NO FIXED FORMULA, but should organize it with following content areas:

A) general statement about your educational and career interests, and why you want to pursue grad school. Try not to be too naive or “gushy” (e.g., “All my life I have wanted to study attributional theory.” or “I have always had this deep longing to help people.”)

B) a statement about your research interests. This should be your largest portion of the letter.

- Start with description in concise detail your research experience in undergraduate program.
- Then, outline the kind of research you want to do in graduate school.
 - Here you want to be *authentic.
 - You want also to be *specific (so that you capture attention of faculty with shared interests), without being too narrow (so that you can capture attention of as many as possible).

PERSONAL STATEMENT

C) a statement about why you want to attend that particular program/school: some applicants obtain brochures and scan the faculty members' statement of research interest and match these statements against their own interests.

- Some may create a short list of faculty members they would want to work with , and may possibly read a publication or two of these faculty members (if you're very thorough).
- These faculty members and the overlapping research interests are indicated in the personal statement. It's a good idea to think about 2 or 3 faculty members you would like to work with.

D) make sure to edit your personal statement rigorously ! You might even ask a friend to go over it.

HOW MANY SCHOOLS SHOULD I APPLY TO?

- A lot: try to apply to as many as you would consider attending
- Acceptance rates to some programs in very low (can be as low as 5%)
- Applying to many schools may help increase your chance of acceptance



THINK ABOUT IT...


A important strategy is to figure out what you would like to do with your life vs. the type of profession you would like to have.

- Then figure out the graduate programs that would help you get to where you want to be
- For instance, if you feel you would like to do social service work with people as a therapist, keep in mind that there are several other professionals that do this, other than a psychologist, that do this work (e.g., social workers, school counsellors, pastoral counsellors).
- Pay attention to the fact that here are also other ways to become an applied psychologist
- You can also go to a graduate program through a Faculty of Education (which have different entrance standards)


REMEMBER:

- Finally, pay close attention to the fact that all the various programs (social personality, neuroscience, clinical, etc) have difference entrance standards
- Standards will also vary from school to school (e.g., it may be harder to get into social personality at School X compared to School Y)

ASKING FACULTY FOR REFERENCE LETTERS

- Be sure to give them a reasonable amount of time to write it (a good rule of thumb is about a month if you can)
 - But it is not as great a burden as you think, and it is part of their job
 - It is easier for professors who know you to write you a letter: so it is to your advantage to conduct yourself as an undergraduate in such a way to make an impact. Professors respond best to those students who actively, creatively, and diplomatically participate in class and turn in excellent work
 - Go to those professors for whom you've done your best work
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ASKING FOR REFERENCE LETTERS

- Provide your resume and in it, some brief note of your work for the professor and the grades you received
 - Provide a copy of your unofficial transcript
 - Write out an indication of how you've done in your other courses and your current interests and plans (this will overlap with the section in your personal statement)
 - It is also beneficial to establish with each faculty you approach whether or not they feel in a position to write you a strong letter of reference (faint praise in a reference letter can be damning)
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FEELINGS OF APPREHENSION...

- In some ways you can't avoid it
- This is a difficult passage for everyone
- Best advice: do not take this process personally. There are other factors involved in whether an applicant gets in besides grades, GREs, and reference letters. Often the degree of fit between the applicant's expressed interests and the interests of the faculty in the program is an important factor.
- Gaining an interview with a faculty member may help but to a larger extent, the process depends on your application file.
- **IN ESSENCE: YOU MAKE A CASE FOR YOURSELF, AND THEN YOU HAVE DONE ALL THAT CAN BE DONE.**
 - “Nothing ventured, nothing gained.” If you don't apply, you will not get in.

APPLICATION TIMELINE

A comprehensive timeline for this process can be found on the Honours Student Website:

<http://www.yorku.ca/health/psyc/PsychologyHonoursstudent.html>

An excellent primer on applying to a Psychology Graduate Program can be found at:

http://www.psychology.uwaterloo.ca/gradprog/preparation/grad_school_in_psych.html



GOOD LUCK!!!!

Questions

