General Tips for Graduate School Preparation

Courses to take beyond the core courses

Specialty courses in psychology
Extra composition/writing courses
Statistics for research (401/402)
Extra math courses

Courses to take before the Psych GRE

Social Psychology (Psych 280)
Cognitive Processes (Psych 316)
History of Psychology (Psych 401)
Learning and Memory (Psych 313)
Brain and Behavior (Psych 310)

Grades

Grades are very important as many programs prefer 3.5 or above GPA. Retaking classes with poor grades is advised.

Activities

Research practicum (Psych 491)
Fieldwork practicum (Psych 492)
Campus organizations – Psych Club
Honorary organizations – Psi Chi, Phi Beta Kappa, Phi Kappa Phi, & Golden Key (by invite)
Professional organizations – state (IPA), regional (MPA), and national (APA)
Peer advising
Volunteering at any agencies (not for credit)

Documents

Start working on a resume by your junior year. If you need help stop by the LAS Career Services in Catt Hall. Some volunteer positions will request a resume and you’ll need it when you have faculty and professionals write the letters of recommendation.

Request an unofficial copy of your transcript from each of the undergraduate institutions attended. Check the transcript for errors and omissions and request that the necessary changes be made. Include an unofficial transcript with your graduate school application so the Admissions Committee will have it in case the official transcript doesn’t arrive on time. Make sure you indicate that an official transcript will be sent from the University also.

Send a printed copy of your GRE scores with your application or when you receive them. Some departments require the percentile information in addition to the scores. Also, give a copy to the people writing your recommendation letters (along with a resume & a copy of your letter of intent).

Keep a copy of your application materials. Verify that your application materials were received – this is your responsibility.
Investigation into Graduate Schools

Find Out:
- What professors are there? Are they leaders in the field? Good programs should have professors that are leaders in their field.
- Check Psych-Lit for publications of the professors. Good researchers should be publishing in “strong journals.” Also check professional journals.
- Talk to grad students at that university. This is very important. Ask pointed but polite questions.
- Look in the reference section of the ISU Library. Find the school you’re interested in and look at these factors:
  - How many students do they admit?
  - How many students graduate?
  - How many students get jobs upon graduation and WHERE?
- Most important: Does that program meet your needs? Can it get you where you want to be in the next four or five years? If you don’t know what you want talk to your faculty adviser, LAS Career Services, or a career counselor in Student Counseling Services.

What Area Should You Apply For?
- Talk with professors you’ve developed a rapport with and ask them about their area of research. Talk with grad students. Find an area that interests you.
- The Ph.D. is a “scholarly” degree that will require A LOT of time and energy-contact with your area of specialty. You will have to REALLY enjoy your area to stay with it. The key is to find an area that you enjoy so you’ll enjoy the research as well.

Request information from all prospective schools that you might apply. This should be done early in the year, preferably summer. The information is free and you might need to alter your first choices by the time you apply due to low or high GRE scores/GPA, etc. Look through the Graduate Schools in Psychology book and other information available in the Psych Advising Office or surf the web (starting with Psych homepage and links to other sites). Many institutions prefer students look at their web page or request information via e-mail. Make sure you specify what program you’re interested in and for what term/year you wish to apply.

After application

Once you have applied, follow-up with the school to make sure all of your application materials have been received. Phone calls are acceptable. You can also call and talk to faculty members that are doing research that interests you. You may want to talk to graduate students in the program for their slant on the program.

If you are invited to visit the school, look presentable and business-like. Don’t gossip. Don’t assume that talking to graduate students is ‘off the record’. Remember that you are interviewing the school as well, so have some questions about the program prepared.

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