So You Want to Go To Graduate School?

Q: What electives can I take to be a quality candidate for acceptance into grad school?

A: Psych 302 and 440 (part of the core) should be taken very seriously by students interested in grad school, and the other courses listed here will be very useful in developing necessary grad school skills regardless of what discipline of psychology is chosen.

PSYCH 302 – Research Methods (required for psych majors)
Discussion of and experience in designing research studies, collecting and analyzing data, and preparing research reports in psychology. Essential in developing communication skills needed for graduate school.

PSYCH 440 – Psychological Measurement (required for psych majors)
Principles of psychological measurement, including concepts of reliability and validity, interpretation of scores, factors influencing performance, construction and use of measures of ability, achievement and personality. Graduate programs consider performance within measurement classes, as well as overall performance, in evaluating a student’s future ability to do graduate work.

**** PSYCH 491 – Research Practicum
Working with a faculty member on his/her research. This can help you focus your interest in psychology as well as provide valuable experience in preparation for graduate school. Graduate programs give priority consideration to candidates who have done research as undergrads.

PSYCH 492 – Fieldwork Practicum
Supervised fieldwork in a human service agency or other appropriate setting. Provides valuable interpersonal experience and assists in deciding which area of psychology the student is most interested in.

ENGLISH 302 – Business Communication
Theory, principles and processes of effective written communication typically encountered in business and professions. Extensive writing practice in standard letter and memo forms, short proposals, policy and procedures descriptions, job descriptions, application letters, resumes, evaluations and letters of recommendation.

ENGLISH 309 – Report and Proposal Writing
Theory and practice of preparing and analyzing reports and proposals for businesses and governmental agencies, and private and corporate foundations.

ENGLISH 314 – Technical Communication
Theories, principles, and processes of effective written communication in the technical disciplines.

STAT 401 - Statistical Methods for Research Workers
Methods of analyzing and interpreting experimental and survey data. Many graduate programs give priority consideration to candidates who have completed statistics courses beyond the minimum requirements.
So You Want to Go To Graduate School

Q: What can I do to become a quality candidate for entrance to grad school?
A: Start now! Don’t wait until you are completing your application and find that you should have done more to be more competitive. There is no guarantee that these suggestions will get you into graduate school, but doing as many as possible will definitely improve your chances. ***Applications for programs starting the next Fall are due in December or January.

1. Grades are very important since the competition is tough for admittance to many programs. You may want to retake classes with grades of a C or lower. Many master’s and PhD programs have minimum GPA requirements. Check with individual graduate schools for specifics. The APA Graduate Study in Psychology book is available in W022 Lagomarcino. Note: If your GPA isn’t excellent, excelling in other areas (GRE score, research experience, having good rec letters, etc.) can often make up for it.

2. Study for the GRE!! The Graduate Records Examination is a test used early in the selection process (along with GPA) by graduate programs to assess applicants. The General GRE assesses Verbal, Quantitative, and Analytical writing skills. It is taken on a computer, but can be taken in a written format at a few specific times each year if necessary. The Psychology GRE is a separate test that covers all of the disciplines of psychology and is required by many schools in addition to the General GRE. The instructions and format of both of these tests is standardized so knowing the format beforehand is beneficial. Study guides can be purchased when the application is submitted, and ETS will send a CD with practice computer tests demonstrating the style and format. Plan to take the General GRE and Psychology GRE on separate dates. Take the practice tests and time them to get acquainted with the time restrictions and format. In addition to study guides, Psychology 101 and History of Psychology textbooks are useful study tools for the Psychology GRE. Information about signing up for both the General GRE and the Subject exams can be found at http://www.ets.org/gre. [See the handout on Preparing for the GRE.]

3. It is VERY important to get some research experience; the more the better! Most master’s and all PhD programs (even clinical/counseling) require students to do extensive research work. Good candidates will be able to demonstrate they are, at the very least, familiar with lab research. Many ISU professors advertise for undergraduates to assist in conducting research. Pick an area of interest and ask those professors if you can work with them by contact them through the advertisements they post in the Psych Undergrad Weekly E-mail Bulletin. If you find that you are uninterested in the area that you choose, ask other professors about their research.

4. Get fieldwork practicum experience, especially if you are planning on working in an applied setting (counseling, school, social work, criminal justice, etc.).

5. Show a genuine interest in psychology by GETTING INVOLVED. This can be accomplished by joining and participating in Psych Club and applying for Psi Chi. Some professional organizations allow students to join as affiliate members. These organizations include the American Psychological Association (APA), the American Psychological Society (APS) and the Midwest Psychological Association (MPA). Information is available in the Psych Club Bulletin Board or in W022 Lago.

6. Start preparing for your recommendations as soon as possible. Two to four references are needed for graduate program applications and they need to be persons that can describe your interest and abilities in the area of psychology. A professor from whom you have only taken a class will not be as familiar with your interests as a professor with whom you have worked. Make sure that professors associate your face and personality with your name. This is especially important if you are going to ask for a reference from a professor with whom you have had limited interaction. Visit them during their office hours and ask questions. HINT: Professors LOVE to discuss their own research!!!

7. Take upper-level courses that will prepare you for graduate study. A list of courses that are recommended for different areas of psychology is available from the Psychology website.

8. Note that some programs (e.g. some medical schools) associate P/NP with a D or D- grade and may count that against you so refigure your GPA using a ‘D’ in those courses. Be sure to check with the schools you want to attend before taking a class P/NP.