

Graduate School Preparation & Application Timeline for Psychology & Neuroscience

****If you are interested in attending graduate school for a specific area within psychology you will typically apply to the school's Psychology department and specify within your application what area you are interested in. Possible areas of Psychology include:**

*Biopsychology (Biological Psychology)
*Clinical Psychology
*Cognitive Psychology
*Developmental Psychology
*Personality Psychology

*Social Psychology
*Organizational Psychology
*Education & Psychology
*Social Work & Psychology
*Women's Studies & Psychology

Freshman Year

- Determine whether you would like to pursue study in the field of Psychology, BCN, or Neuroscience by taking pre-requisite and gateway courses.
- Extensive research experience is a **key component** in making you a **competitive applicant** for graduate programs in Psychology, BCN, or Neuroscience, especially for PhD programs. Therefore, during the end of your first year you should meet with an advisor to discuss research opportunities.

Sophomore Year

- Meet with an advisor to discuss research opportunities. Some faculty members prefer that students have an understanding of research methods before working in a research lab. Therefore, it is preferable that you take a methods-based lab course during your second or third year. See your advisor to discuss which labs are appropriate for your concentration.

Note: Within the Psychology concentration there are numerous lab courses under the "Experiential Labs" section that are either community-based or research-based. Research-based labs are more desirable to graduate programs and are highly recommended if this is your post-graduation goal, however the community-based labs provide excellent opportunities to get involved in community projects and can be taken in addition to research-based labs. Some Psychology graduate programs may want prospective students to have involvement in their community. Please refer to the specific program requirements as to what experience is needed.

- Take core courses, a statistics course, lab course (preferably methods-based first), and possibly a cognate/breadth course, or an advanced course (second term).
- You should keep a nice balance between concentration courses and courses used for LSA distribution requirements. This way you will keep your course load diverse and interesting.
- Begin to research graduate level programs within your field of interest. Use the Psychology Resource Room and online tools to assist in your search. Keep in mind that your goal is to match yourself up with a mentor/program based on your research interests.
- Open a file for reference letters at The Career Center. Begin forming relationships with professors because when you are ready to apply for graduate programs, you will need at least 3 letters of recommendation. See more information about letters of recommendation below.

Junior Year

- Continue with research experience by taking any of the research-based labs listed above (see your advisor for more information on how this will impact your concentration requirements). One good course to take is **Psych 331, which is both a method-based and research-based lab course that is designed to give students a feel for what is like to be a first year graduate student**. This type of course should be taken if you are planning to go to graduate school.
- In addition to taking lab courses, you should also take advanced courses (300-500 level).
- If you have not already started researching graduate programs at the end of your second year, you need to do so at the start of your third year. The faculty mentor you have been doing research for will be an excellent and prime resource. When going to graduate school in Psychology, BCN or Neuroscience, it is extremely important that you choose an appropriate graduate mentor, even more so than reputation of the school. Keep in mind that reputable faculty tend to belong to highly-ranked programs. In addition, although most graduate programs within a field have similar requirements for admissions it is very important you recognize any special or specific requirements.
- You should plan to take the GRE before your last year (and before the semester in which you will apply to graduate school). Research your top program choices to determine if they also require the GRE Psychology Subject Test. Register to take the GRE (and Psychology Subject Test, if applicable) and enroll in a Kaplan GRE preparation course or buy a Kaplan GRE prep book and begin preparing for this exam (you can discuss the pros and cons of each with your advisor).
- If you have research experience at this point and you meet the minimum overall GPA requirement (3.4), then consider completing an honors thesis. You should think about applying to complete an honors thesis within your concentration by the end of your junior year, preferably during registration time. For more information about completing an honors thesis please make an appointment to see the honors advisor by calling or coming into the Psychology Student Academic Affairs Office, 1343 East Hall, 764-2580.
- Ask people for letters of recommendation. Update your reference letter file at The Career Center.

Senior Year

- Complete concentration requirements. During the term before you plan to graduate you should meet with a concentration advisor to begin your degree audit.
- Continue gaining as much research experience as possible.
- Complete and submit applications for graduate programs. Although most are due in December, you will need to refer to each program's website for specific deadlines. When obtaining letters of recommendation give your recommenders **at least 3 months notice** prior to when you would like the letters. When you ask for a letter of recommendation it is more effective to ask "Can you write me a strong letter of recommendation?" rather than "Will you write me a letter of recommendation?" The former encourages only letters that will positively affect your application, whereas the latter is not specific. Suggestions of who you might ask would be your: employer, instructor & research faculty. It is important that your knowledge, skills, and characteristics (academic skills, research experience, and related work/internship experience) are highlighted in your letters of recommendation. Graduate programs ask your recommenders to address the following in their recommendation letter (organized by importance in descending order, so make sure you can provide examples of each to your recommender), in a copy of your resume and transcript, as well as in your personal statement (Appleby, 2005; Appleby, Keenan, & Mauer, 1999):

*Motivated & hard-working

*High intellectual/scholarly ability

*Research skills

*Emotionally stable & mature

*Writing skills

*Speaking skills

*Teaching skills/potential

*Works well with others

*Creative & original

*Strong knowledge of area of study

*Strong character/integrity

*Special skills (e.g. computer or lab)

*Capable of analytical thought

*Broad general knowledge

*Intellectually independent

*Leadership ability

- Most graduate programs will also require a Personal Statement and Resume. These will be another key component to your application. This is where you can express your background and interest in particular areas/faculty of Psychology as well as how you will excel in the program for which you are applying. The Career Center is an excellent resource for these items.
- During the second term of your final year you will begin to hear back from the graduate programs you applied for. As you wait to hear back you should also meet with an advisor at The Career Center or a concentration advisor to discuss options if you do not get into a graduate program.
- Even if you do get into a graduate program, it is important you continue to excel in your courses, as graduate programs do look at your final term grades.

****No matter where you are in your undergraduate career, ALWAYS meet with a Psychology; Biopsychology, Cognition, and Neuroscience (BCN); or Neuroscience advisor periodically to discuss concentration requirements, check progress, and to create a manageable plan to complete concentration course work. Peer Advisors are also a great resource for searching for the right program. The Career Center can also assist with your post-graduation plans (either job or graduate school-related).**

LSA Psychology
Student Academic Affairs Office
1343 East Hall
Appointments: (734) 764-2580
psych.saa@umich.edu
<http://www.lsa.umich.edu/psych>

The Career Center
3200 Student Activities Bldg.
Appointments: (734) 764-7460
careercenter@umich.edu
<http://careercenter.umich.edu/index.html>

** The Psychology Student Academic Affairs Office has subscriptions to online resources and books to assist in your search for a graduate program. Please see a Peer Advisor during their walk-in advising for more information (check for their Fall & Winter hours).

Helpful Websites

American Psychological Association http://www.apa.org	University of Michigan Career Center http://www.careercenter.umich.edu/
Peterson's College & Graduate School Planning http://www.petersons.com	LSA Student Academic Advising http://www.lsa.umich.edu/lsa/students/resources/academics/advising/
Grad School Search Guide http://www.gradschools.com	UM Psychology Faculty Research Interests http://www.lsa.umich.edu/psych/people/faculty-research/
USNews.com: America's Best Graduate Schools http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/grad/rankings/	UM Psychology Research Labs http://www.lsa.umich.edu/psych/research/labs/
GRE: Graduate Record Examinations http://www.ets.org	UM Molecular, Cellular, Developmental Biology (MCDB) Research Interests http://www.mcdb.lsa.umich.edu/research.php?&sidenavInfo=research&sectionOne=resint
Science http://www.sciencecareers.org	Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (UROP) http://www.lsa.umich.edu/urop/