

# GETTING INTO GRADUATE SCHOOL

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## CHOOSING A CAREER/GRADUATE PROGRAM

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### APPROACHES TO CHOOSING A CAREER/GRADUATE PROGRAM

#### ❖ The “Divine Calling” Mentality

- I have known what my life’s work will be ever since I was a child, so I don’t need to explore this question at all.
- I have known which university I wanted to attend since I was a child.

#### ❖ The “What Ever Comes Along” Mentality

- I am keeping my options open as long as possible because I do not even want to think about it.
- I will just take whatever job/graduate program falls into my lap.

#### ❖ The “Department Store” Mentality

- I will choose the one that is the most attractively packaged.
  - E.g., Many private schools put a lot of effort into recruiting and luring students.

#### ❖ The “Don’t Leave My Comfort Zone” Mentality

- I don’t want to leave my undergraduate university because I like everyone here and feel comfortable here.

Each of these approaches to choosing a career/graduate program is very limiting. These approaches involve little research into the available options or the advantages and disadvantages of different careers/graduate programs.

#### ❖ The “Effective Consumer” Mentality – involves researching potential options to see which is the best “fit.”

- E.g., Satisfied car shoppers (i.e., consumers) will research many types of cars to see which best fits their personality, needs, and available means. Then, they will look at various dealerships to compare prices to get the best deal.
- Individuals who approach a career/graduate program in the same manner as the effective car shopper will have more choices and get a better job and/or into a better graduate program than those who use the other methods.
- **Invest adequate time in searching for a career/graduate program**
  - Most people invest limited time and resources (e.g., a few hours a week). Instead, make the search a full-time job.
  - Do not wait until you are unemployed to search for potential jobs. Make job search a regular daily habit.
  - Do not wait until your senior year or after graduation to seek out graduation programs.

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Positive Reasons for Going to Graduate School	Negative Reasons for Going to Graduate School
Necessary for many careers	Often times used to postpone a career or to avoid employment
More well-rounded education and broadens skills	Pressure from peers, parents, faculty, etc.
Makes more options available	To find one’s self
Gives an edge over competition	Just because financial assistance was offered

### TYPES OF GRADUATE PROGRAMS

- ❖ **Research Scientist Model** (also called Bench Science) – A graduate program using this model prepares students to be researchers/scientists. Hence, the focus is on basic scientific concepts and theories. Although the research may be basic or applied, the focus is the research process itself.
- ❖ **Scientist-Practitioner Model** – A graduate program using this model prepares students to be both scientists and practitioners. Hence, the focus is on clinical/applied research as well as clinical/applied experience.
- ❖ **Professional Model** (also called the Practitioner-Scholar Model) – A graduate program using this model prepares students to be a practitioner/clinician (e.g., PsyD, lawyer, medical doctor).
  - Hence, the focus is developing and using skills based on the practical application of scholarly knowledge.
  - An understanding of current research and scholarship is important so as to improve practice.

### ❖ Terminal degree vs. doctoral preparation programs

- A terminal degree master's program refers to programs where (1) the students can pursue their career with just the master's degree, and (2) where the vast majority of students in the program do not pursue a doctorate.
    - Examples that are usually terminal degree programs: social work, marriage and family therapy, school counseling, university counseling, business administration, healthcare administration, public administration, nurse practitioner.
  - A doctoral preparation master's program is specifically designed to help students prepare for a future doctorate (e.g., research methods and statistics classes, faculty research mentor). A thesis is often required.
    - E.g., post-baccalaureate pre-medical preparation program, general experimental psychology master's program
- ❖ Note: In many Ph.D. programs, students will complete a master's degree as part of the Ph.D.

## WHAT ARE GRADUATE PROGRAMS LOOKING FOR?<sup>1</sup>

### Very Important Criteria

- ❖ All materials turned in on-time!
- ❖ A clear and focused statement of purpose (⇒ Refer to the "Guidelines for the Statement of Purpose" section).
- ❖ A strong fit between the graduate program and your goals, interest area, and skills/attributes.
- ❖ Admissions tests (⇒ Refer to the "Admission Tests" section).
- ❖ Good grades are necessary, but good grades are not enough. Most applicants will have excellent grades.
  - It is difficult to compare grades across departments or campus; thus, grades are just one of many criteria used to evaluate applicants. This is also why many programs emphasize scores on an admissions test.
  - Many students will not have a high GPA at the beginning of their academic career (possibly because they originally majored in an area they were not excited about). If your overall GPA is not high, but your major GPA or last 2-year GPA is high, briefly point that out in your personal statement.
- ❖ **For research scientist and scientist-practitioner programs** – Research experience resulting in a publication or professional conference presentation(s).
  - Publishing for novice scholars: <http://www.csun.edu/plunk/documents/PublishingPresentation.pdf>
  - There are many undergraduate research journals that are peer-reviewed.
    - List of undergraduate journals: <http://www.cur.org/ugjournal.html>
    - Undergraduate Research Journal for the Human Sciences: [http://www.kon.org/CFP/cfp\\_urjhs.html](http://www.kon.org/CFP/cfp_urjhs.html)
- ❖ **For professional model programs and terminal degree programs** – practical experience in the field (e.g., internships, volunteer, work).
- ❖ Letters of recommendation (⇒ Refer to the "References" section).

### Generally Important Criteria

- ❖ Honors and scholarships – It is difficult to meaningfully compare honors/scholarships among candidates.
- ❖ Course work
  - Undergraduate major(s) and minor(s)
  - Most candidates will likely complete the prerequisites (e.g., biology and chemistry classes for medical schools).
  - For Ph.D. programs, statistics and research courses will be especially relevant (even if they are not prerequisites).

### Avoid Liabilities (discussed in later sections)<sup>2</sup>

- ❖ Damaging personal statements
- ❖ Weak or harmful letters of recommendation
- ❖ Poor writing skills
- ❖ Misfired efforts to impress

<sup>1</sup> Keith-Spiegel, P. & Wiederman, M. W. (2002). *The complete guide to graduate school admission*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

<sup>2</sup> Appleby, D. C., & Appleby, K. M. (2006). Kisses of death in the graduate school application process. *Teaching of Psychology*, 33(1), 19–24. doi:10.1207/s15328023top3301\_5

## ADMISSIONS TESTS

- ❖ Check the graduate program admissions criteria to see what scores are required or recommended.
  - Some programs (especially those that follow the “professional model”) do not require an admission test.
- ❖ Take a preparation course and practice exams to increase scores. Study, study, study!
- ❖ Test services typically report your scores from the last five years to the school.
  - Some schools use the highest score, while others average all scores.
  - Don't take the test just for practice unless you know the school only uses your highest score.
- ❖ Take your test early so your scores will be available by the admission deadline and so you can retake the test if needed.
  - Generally, try to take the test during your first semester senior year. A study found individuals who took graduate school admission tests while still in school generally scored higher than those who waited until after they graduated.
  - Medical school applicants should take the MCAT during their junior year.

Some Admission Tests for Graduate School

Exam	Agency	Webpage / Phone
DAT	Dental Admission Test	American Dental Association <a href="http://www.ada.org">http://www.ada.org</a>
GMAT	Graduate Management Admissions Test	Educational Testing Service <a href="http://www.gmat.org">http://www.gmat.org</a>
GRE	Graduate Record Examination	Educational Testing Service-GRE <a href="http://www.gre.org">http://www.gre.org</a>
LSAT	Law School Admission Test	Law School Admission Council <a href="http://www.lsac.org">http://www.lsac.org</a>
MAT	Millers Analogies	Psychological Corporation 800-622-3231
MCAT	Medical College Admission Test	Association of American Medical Colleges <a href="http://www.aamc.org">http://www.aamc.org</a>
Praxis Exam	Formerly known as the National Teachers Exam	Teaching & Learning Division, Educational Testing Service <a href="http://www.ets.org/praxis">http://www.ets.org/praxis</a>
OAT	Optometry Admission Test	Optometry Admission Test (312) 440-2693
PCAT	Pharmacy College Admission Test	American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy <a href="http://pcatweb.info/">http://pcatweb.info/</a>
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language	Educational Testing Service - TOEFL <a href="http://www.toefl.org">http://www.toefl.org</a>
VAT	Veterinary Admission Test	

## EVALUATING/CHOOSING GRADUATE PROGRAMS

- ❖ Decide what type of program you want and what your primary focus will be.
- ❖ Research graduate programs
  - Begin at least one semester before the application deadline. For example, if the application deadline is in December, you should be researching graduate programs in the prior spring or summer.
  - Find a graduate program that has a strong program in your area of interest.
  - Examine the school's home page to identify the faculty members' academic interests and publications
- ❖ Check the course catalog to determine if the school offers the courses you want.
- ❖ Search out information about the faculty in the prospective graduate program.
  - Do the faculty hold advanced or terminal degrees in their field?
  - Are the faculty respected by colleagues in the field?
  - Are there faculty members with interests similar to your career goals?
- ❖ For those pursuing a Ph.D., examine faculty research interests.
  - What research topics are studied?
  - Does the faculty member present and publish with students?
  - Does the faculty member have grants?
- ❖ Examine admission requirements.
- ❖ Talk to faculty members at the school you are interested in.
  - Your goals are to introduce yourself, find out if they are taking students, discern what they are planning with their research in the future, but not take too much of their time.
  - Send a very short email to the faculty members that says you are interested in their program and that their research is a good fit with your research interests. Then politely ask if (1) they are taking students, and (2) if their research interests are the same as published on the webpage.
    - In the subject line, put something like, “Inquiry from potential Ph.D. applicant”
    - Some advocate attaching a resume or vita to the email.
      - Plunk's opinion: *I wouldn't put an attachment because (1) the attachment can increase the likelihood of it being viewed as spam or including malware (I won't open an attachment from most people), and (2) it is almost like saying, “Please evaluate my application materials now ahead of everyone else.”*

- In your signature line, include a link to your academia.edu, researchgate.net, or LinkedIn.com webpage.
  - A bonus of having the academia page is you can check to see if someone accessed the page from the geographic area where you sent an email. Thus, you can see if a faculty member was potentially interested in you.
  - Have a PDF copy of your resume or vita on your webpage.
- Do not be discouraged if a faculty member does not reply back. At highly competitive programs, they are likely to receive numerous emails from prospective students.
- Remember to keep the email short. Faculty members are very busy, and they are likely to just skim a long email to see if/how they should respond. Do not use the email to tell them in-depth information about yourself. If they are interested, they will examine your webpage. Also, they will eventually see your application materials.
- For similar and divergent views, read this informative webpage: <https://lucklab.ucdavis.edu/blog/2018/9/17/emailing-faculty>
- If they do email back, be respectful of their time.
- Network with faculty members and/or their students at professional conferences.
  - Although your agenda is to meet prospective faculty, those faculty also have an agenda (e.g., networking with colleagues, helping their students meet faculty, presenting their research). Thus, be very conscientious and respectful of their time. In other words, meet them so they can put a face to your name, but don't be a nuisance.
- If a faculty member is interested, s/he may maintain contact with you and/or advocate for you when the admission committee makes its decisions.
- Do not write to faculty members for a catalog and/or admission material. Check the webpage first, and if the materials are not there, then email the graduate coordinator or department for that information.
- ❖ Attend informational meetings on campus or at professional conferences.
- ❖ Talk with alumni from your prospective school.
- ❖ Talk to current graduate students about the program, funding, and specific faculty.
- ❖ If you can, visit schools you are interested in before applying to the program.
  - Many schools provide funding for prospective graduate students to come visit.
  - Many schools provide summer research fellowships which can help you determine if you are a good fit.
- ❖ Determine if funding is available (e.g., fellowships, research/teaching assistantships, and/or tuition fee waivers).
- ❖ Determine if there is housing available for graduate students.
- ❖ Can you handle the weather where the university is located? Similarly, check allergy reports.
- ❖ If relevant, find out whether the specific graduate program is professionally accredited.
  - U.S. Department of Education
  - Council for Higher Education Accreditation
  - Professional organization in your discipline (e.g., American Psychological Association)
- ❖ Find out whether the university is regionally accredited (see next table).

#### Regional Accrediting Agencies

Accrediting Agencies	Region	Home Page
Middle States Association of Colleges and School	DE, DC, MD, NJ, NY, PA, Puerto Rico, US Virgin Islands	<a href="http://www.msache.org">http://www.msache.org</a>
New England Association of Schools and Colleges	CT, MA, ME, NH, RI, VT	<a href="http://www.neasc.org">http://www.neasc.org</a>
North Central Association of Colleges and Schools	AK, AZ, CO, IA, IL, IN, KS, MI, MN, MO, ND, NE, NM, OH, OK, SD, WI, WV, WY	<a href="http://www.ncacihe.org">http://www.ncacihe.org</a>
Northwest Association of Colleges and Schools	AK, ID, MT, NV, OR, UT, WA	<a href="http://www.cocnasc.org">http://www.cocnasc.org</a>
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools	AL, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN, TX, VA	<a href="http://www.sacs.org">http://www.sacs.org</a>
Western Association of Schools and Colleges	CA, HI, Guam	<a href="http://www.wasc.web.org">http://www.wasc.web.org</a>

## Tentative Timeline for Doctoral Programs

Action	Tentative Timeline
Decide on type(s) of program(s) in which you are interested	Spring or early summer
Review admissions criteria for the types of programs	Spring or early summer
Study for admissions test (e.g., GRE, LSAT, MCAT)	Summer
Decide which schools and advisors in which you intend to apply	September deadline
Update resume/vita	September (and throughout the process)
Create marketing/networking webpage (e.g. Academia.edu, LinkedIn.com)	September
Take admissions test	September/October
Send <b>short</b> email to prospective advisors at doctorate programs	Early October
Solicit commitment from faculty/supervisors to write letters of recommendation (usually 3 letters are needed)	Early October
Finalize list of programs	October
Prepare writing sample (if required)	October
Secure transcripts	October
Submit materials to letter writers	4-6 weeks before deadline
Submit all materials	November 15-March 15 (depending on programs)
Remind letter writers that the letters are coming due	One week before deadline
Remind letter writers again that the letters are coming due	One day before deadline
Send "thank you" email/card to all people who wrote letters	One week after deadline
Wait ... and wait some more ... and wait some more	Winter break and early spring
Rejections, acceptances, and/or interview offers	Spring
Review program and faculty webpages prior to visit	Day before visitation/interview
Interview or attend campus visitation days	Late January through March
Send 'thank you' email to individuals you met with during the interview	Day after visitation/interview
Make decision	March-April
Discuss and/or negotiate funding	March-April
Send update emails to all people who helped you in the process	March-April

## Tentative Timeline for Terminal Degree Programs

Action	Tentative Timeline
Decide on type(s) of program(s) in which you are interested	Spring or early summer
Review admissions criteria for the types of programs	Summer
Study for admissions test (e.g., GRE, LSAT, MCAT)	Summer
Decide which schools/programs you intend to apply	Fall
Update resume/vita	Fall (and throughout the process)
Create marketing/networking webpage (e.g. Academia.edu, LinkedIn.com)	Fall
Attend informational sessions provided by the program	Fall
Take admissions test (if required)	Approximately one month prior to application deadline
Solicit commitment from faculty/supervisors to write letters of recommendation (usually 3 letters are needed)	Approximately two months prior to application deadline
Finalize list of programs	Fall
Secure transcripts	At end of semester prior to deadline
Submit materials to letter writers	4-6 weeks before deadline
Submit all materials	Check to see if there is a priority deadline. If so, submit materials before the priority deadline because preference is sometimes given for admission and funding
Remind letter writers that the letters are coming due	One week before deadline
Remind letter writers again that the letters are coming due	One day before deadline
Send "thank you" email/card to all people who wrote letters	One week after deadline
Wait ... and wait some more ... and wait some more	January-March
Rejections, acceptances, and/or interview offers	Spring
Review program webpages prior to visit	Day before visitation/interview
Interview or attend campus visitation days	Late January through March
Send 'thank you' email to individuals you met with during the interview	Day after visitation/interview
If not accepted, send "thank you for not accepting me" letter	Day after non-acceptance
Make decision	March-April
Send update emails to all people who helped you in the process	March-April

## **GUIDELINES FOR THE STATEMENT OF PURPOSE / PERSONAL STATEMENT**

- ❖ Also referred to as autobiographical statement, letter of intent, personal statement, or statement of interest.
- ❖ Most graduate programs require some type of personal statement or essay. However, requirements vary widely. Some programs only require a few paragraphs about your reasons for applying to their graduate school while other programs require numerous essays on various topics.
- ❖ Start composing your statement of purpose early.
- ❖ Before writing:
  - Think of your audience. Who will be reading this statement? What will the admission committee be looking for?
  - Examine the application materials and literature about the graduate program to determine the primary focus and interests of the faculty and department.
- ❖ Demonstrate the quality of your writing.
  - Have a clear focus and be organized. Make an outline prior to starting the writing.
  - Be succinct and concise.
  - Avoid repetition, overelaboration, and colloquialisms (e.g., "I'm a people person," or "I hung out").
- ❖ Keep your essay positive.
  - In general, do not mention potential liabilities about yourself or your current program.
  - Be enthusiastic about the field and your career goals.
- ❖ Make sure your statement fits with the graduate program mission.
- ❖ If you are applying to a Ph.D. or master's program that uses the research-scientist or scientist-practitioner model, then make sure your statement fits with a specific faculty's interests.
- ❖ Follow guidelines exactly!
  - Each school has different guidelines, so you will have to tailor each statement of purpose accordingly.
  - Address EACH aspect of their questions.
  - Some programs often ask multiple questions. Address each question separately.
    - E.g., social work programs often ask you to write about your work/volunteer experiences, how you fit within the mission of social work, what area of social justice you are interested in, and your experiences with diversity.
  - Do not exceed the page limit or word limit.
- ❖ Content
  - Identify your educational and career goal.
  - Briefly (1-2 sentences) explain how you became interested in the field.
  - Highlight your educational and work experiences that facilitated your desire to achieve a graduate degree in the field:
    - Education background.
    - Explain how your paid and volunteer experience validated your desire to pursue this career.
    - Each of these experiences should demonstrate how they led to your educational/career path.
    - For Ph.D. and master's programs leading to Ph.D., explain your research background.
  - Identify why are you applying to this specific program and/or faculty member.
    - If possible, you should tie your research interests with at least 2 faculty members to increase your chances. Obviously, these faculty members need to be doing similar research.
  - Explain how this program will position you for your career.
  - Explain your personal attributes that make you a good fit with the program and future career (e.g., fluency in languages, fluency in statistical programs or programming languages, ability to overcome obstacles, work ethic).
- ❖ Throughout the statement, emphasize what you bring to the program, without overstating your abilities.
  - Strengths and achievements.
  - Mention relevant skills (e.g., research and computing skills).
- ❖ Every sentence on the statement should be designed to help the reviewer (1) understand that your applying to this program was well thought out, and (2) what you can bring to the program and career.
- ❖ Always remember this is your professional representation of yourself.

- ❖ Damaging personal statements<sup>3</sup>
  - Do not engage in excessive self-disclosure that takes you away from the important point (i.e., why they should accept/interview you). Avoid getting caught up in all the miniscule details that led you to pursue the career.
  - Do not over disclose personal mental health issues.
  - Do not demonstrate “excessive altruism”
    - “*I want to make the world a better place.*” or “*I want to help humanity.*”
  - Avoid unprofessional writing (e.g., inappropriate humor, overly clever comments, or cutesy comments)
- ❖ Integrate characteristics that show you have overcome challenges without creating a damaging personal statement.
  - E.g., if you immigrated to the USA as a child, neither parent had a college degree, and you grew up in poverty, it would be easy to write many paragraphs about all of the challenges you overcame. However, this “telling of your story” takes you away from why they should accept you into the program. Instead, integrate these ideas into your research interests, without providing too much focus on the minute details (e.g., “*As an immigrant to the USA, I believe I can provide an insider’s view when interpreting research on immigrant families.*” and/or “*Having grown up as an immigrant in high-risk neighborhoods, I am very passionate about conducting research (or clinical practice) on identifying qualities that promote positive mental health in low SES immigrants*”)
- ❖ Draft an initial statement and revise the draft. Then set it aside for a day or two, and then revise the draft again.
- ❖ Have others proofread and critique your statement (e.g., major advisor, references)
- ❖ The statement should be modified for each school/program.

## THE GRADUATE SCHOOL INTERVIEW

- ❖ A graduate school interview is similar to a professional job interview.
- ❖ Be prepared to talk about your professional goals, your knowledge of the field, your strengths (e.g., personal attributes, skills), and if you are a Ph.D. candidate, your research interests
- ❖ Investigate the school’s program before the interview so you can clearly articulate how your goals match the program.
- ❖ For a Ph.D. program, look at faculty members’ webpages to familiarize yourself with their names, faces, and research.
- ❖ Know the answers to these questions before you go to the interview
  - How did you become interested in this field?
  - Why do you want to pursue a graduate or professional degree?
  - What are your future goals? How will this graduate program help you meet your goals?
  - What have you accomplished so far that strengthens your interest in the program? (e.g., course work, honor’s thesis, research projects, internships, volunteer experience, work experience, awards, and publications).
  - Why are you applying to this school? (e.g., faculty, curriculum, resources, field work, internships, and reputation of the institution and/or department).
  - What are your research interests? (primarily for Ph.D. candidates)
- ❖ Oftentimes, graduate programs will arrange socials for prospective students to meet current students, faculty members, and other prospective students.
  - Do not drink alcoholic beverages. (even at a social event with the current graduate students)!!! Don’t get drunk...
  - Do not flirt or gossip.
- ❖ You will be in multiple group settings where you are asked to introduce yourself. If they ask for something interesting about you, do not say something weird or crazy to shock them. Just say something unique about you that makes you marketable (e.g., “*I speak two languages fluently*”).
- ❖ Things to do at the interview
  - Check weather beforehand to know what to wear/bring
  - Dress professionally.
  - Ask questions about the following – academic program, internships, teaching and research assistantships, access to faculty, job placement information, and student life resources. Do not ask questions that are on the webpage.
  - Be pleasant to everyone (even if you are tired from traveling).

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<sup>3</sup> Appleby, D. C., & Appleby, K. M. (2006). Kisses of death in the graduate school application process. *Teaching of Psychology*, 33(1), 19–24. doi:10.1207/s15328023top3301\_5

- Be appreciative and respectful of anyone who hosts you (e.g., graduate student who lets you stay at their place). Pack a few thank-you cards and give one to your host before you leave.
- Send a short thank-you email to anyone who went out of their way to help you (e.g., graduate student who hosted you, graduate coordinator, potential advisor)
- Be nice to the other candidates and socialize with them. Even if you don't end up in that program, they are likely to be your future colleagues.
- Show excitement even if you don't think that you are going to end up in a certain program. Remind yourself that they have paid money and have gone through trouble to get you there.
- Practice your 30 second elevator speech ("*My name is BLANK, and I would like to work with Dr. BLANK. I am currently doing this research at this university, and I am interested in studying...* (something that clearly aligns with the mentor's research).
- Make sure you explore the area (e.g., food, entertainment, living, cultures).
- Read the program handbook if you can find it online. It will help to familiarize you with the program.
- ❖ Things NOT do at the interview
  - Do not bad-mouth other programs, departments, etc.
  - Do not act competitive and do not act like you are better than the other candidates.
  - Try to avoid the "name game" as much as possible.
  - Do not ask about people's personal/romantic relationships.
  - Do not pretend to know things you don't know.
  - Do not call the faculty members by their first names unless they have clearly stated you should; even then, when you are talking about them with other students and faculty members refer to them as Dr. LAST NAME.
- ❖ There are websites where students post when they hear about interviews, acceptances, and rejections.  
<https://www.thegradcafe.com/survey/index.php>

### Sample Questions for Interviews in Counseling / Social Work Graduate Programs

- ❖ Why are you pursuing this degree/career?
- ❖ Tell us about yourself and why are you interested in this field?
- ❖ In the last 24 hours, what did you do to prepare for this interview today?
- ❖ Do you plan on working during the program? If so, how will you balance the coursework, practicum, work, and personal/family life?
- ❖ How do you balance competing obligations?
- ❖ How do you resolve conflict with another person? Given an example.
- ❖ What on your application did you think might keep you from getting into the program? (e.g., grades, experience)
- ❖ What might be a weakness or limitation you might have in the graduate program or in the field?
- ❖ What do you do to counteract your weaknesses?
- ❖ What was the biggest event that happened in your life that made you who you are today?
- ❖ How are you feeling right now about this interview?
- ❖ What would make you an effective counselor/social worker?
- ❖ What experience have you had that led you to choose this degree/career?
- ❖ What is an LMFT vs. social worker? Or school counselor vs. school psychologist?
- ❖ What experience do you have with diversity?
- ❖ What does cross-cultural mean to you?
- ❖ Do you think that a counselor/social worker should only see clients of the same ethnicity? Why or why not?
- ❖ Do you think that a counselor/social worker should only do therapy on issues they have personally experienced (e.g., addiction, divorce)? Why or why not?
- ❖ What do you believe are important qualities for a counselor/social worker to have?
- ❖ What qualities do you have that would make you a good counselor/social worker?
- ❖ How does change take place?
- ❖ What therapeutic paradigm do you currently believe in?
- ❖ What is the most important social issue that counselors/social workers should try to remedy? Or, what is the social issue you would like to focus on?
- ❖ What do you think would be stressful or difficult as a counselor/social worker?

- ❖ Identify a problem in a school setting and how you might try to resolve it.
- ❖ Some programs will ask you to explain what someone with this degree does (e.g., "What is a school psychologist?"). This question has flustered many candidates; resulting in not getting an admission offer. Thus, consult the webpage of the professional organization for the field in which you are applying to see how they conceptualize the career.
- ❖ Anything brought up in previous questions you would like to add now?

### Sample Questions for Interviews in Ph.D. Programs

- ❖ What would you like to accomplish as a Ph.D. student?
- ❖ What kind of position are you interested in pursuing after your Ph.D.?
- ❖ What is your research interest?
- ❖ What type of research experience have you had?
- ❖ What statistics do you know how to do? What statistics programs are you familiar with?
- ❖ How do you see your research fitting with my research and the program?
- ❖ Ideally, what kind of relationship would you like to have with your major advisor?
- ❖ As a new person in the lab, you will be under the supervision of more senior Ph.D. students? How will you handle this? What if they are doing something in the lab you think could be done in a better way, how would you address that?
- ❖ What is your biggest challenge to completing your Ph.D.? What makes you anxious about pursuing a Ph.D.?
- ❖ What do you think makes you stand out from other Ph.D. applicants?
- ❖ Why are you applying to this school? (e.g., faculty, curriculum, resources, fieldwork, internships, and reputation)?
- ❖ What experience have you had that led you to choose this degree/career?
- ❖ What have you accomplished so far that strengthens your interest in the program? (e.g., coursework, honor's thesis, research projects, internships, volunteer experience, work experience, awards, and publications).
- ❖ Why do you want to pursue a graduate or professional degree?
- ❖ How did you become interested in this field?
- ❖ Do you have a plan for funding for your dissertation?
- ❖ What percentage of time would you like to spend doing research versus teaching?
- ❖ What do you think are your strengths as a future Ph.D. student?
- ❖ What do you think are your current weaknesses as a future Ph.D. student?
- ❖ What is your career goal? What are your future goals? How will this graduate program help you meet your goals?
- ❖ What type of university would you like to be a faculty member at? (Research 1, Ph.D. granting, Land Grant, comprehensive, teaching, community college)
- ❖ What type of teaching experience have you had? What would your students say about you?
- ❖ What other programs have you applied to? Which ones have accepted you? Are you seriously considering any?
- ❖ If there are any weaknesses in your application (e.g., low GRE scores, lack of experience in a certain method or population the potential advisor specializes in), be prepared to talk about it and how you will/have corrected it. Practice this! Nobody likes talking about their failures or flaws and you don't want to be flustered in the meeting.
- ❖ If switching programs (e.g., clinical psychology to school psychology), be prepared to discuss why you want to make the switch. Important: Do this without talking negatively about your previous program.

### Potential Questions to Ask at the Interview in Counseling / Social Work Graduate Programs

- ❖ Note: Do not ask a question that is already answered on the webpage for the program.
- ❖ How are the practicum/internship sites selected?
- ❖ How would you describe the relationship between the faculty and the students in the program?
- ❖ What do you see as the biggest strength of this program?
- ❖ What is the biggest frustration for students in this program?
- ❖ How are faculty mentors/advisors selected?
- ❖ What types of jobs are recent graduates getting?

### Questions to Ask of Potential Advisor in the Ph.D. program

- ❖ How would you describe the environment in your research lab?
- ❖ What do you think your graduate student mentees would say about you?

- ❖ How would you describe your mentorship style?
- ❖ What is your research focus over the next 5 years? What will graduate students be working on in the next 5 years?
- ❖ What are you looking for in an advisee? What are your expectations for your advisees?
- ❖ What would you expect me to accomplish in my first year of the Ph.D. program?
- ❖ What would you expect me to accomplish in the whole Ph.D. program?
- ❖ What kinds of opportunities do you provide for co-authoring publications?
- ❖ How do your advisees select their thesis/dissertation topic?
- ❖ What is your view about your advisees working with other faculty members?
- ❖ What type of funding do your advisees normally get? (assistantships, fellowships, etc).
- ❖ What is your expectation for me regarding winter break and summer break?
- ❖ Is there funding for travel to conferences? (Note: CSUN provides more travel funding than most schools).
- ❖ How many students have you advised in the past and how many have you co-advised? What are they doing now? (Ask specifically how many dissertations they have chaired to completion?)
- ❖ Do you plan to stay at this university for the next 5 years?
- ❖ If your potential advisor is working in the community, ask how the relationships are with these community partners.
- ❖ If you are doing community work, ask if you can meet with community workers since they may have a different perspective about the program.

### Questions to Ask of the Ph.D. program

- ❖ Is the funding guaranteed? (note: many programs do not guarantee funding since they might get stuck funding a graduate student who is terrible).
- ❖ Are there teaching opportunities in addition to research?
- ❖ What do you think are the primary strengths of this Ph.D. program?
- ❖ What do you think are the areas for improvement?
- ❖ What career paths have past graduates of this program taken?
- ❖ How does the department contribute to students' professional development?
- ❖ Are there any graduate scholarships? (either in the department or from the university)
- ❖ What funding resource will be available for summer?
- ❖ Is the insurance covered?
- ❖ What kind of certificates or minors are available through college or university that some of the past students have gotten? What are the requirements for these certificates (e.g., stats, teaching and mentoring)?
- ❖ Are there any program-specific requirements (e.g., a mandatory minor, leadership requirements, TA requirements)?
- ❖ How many transfer credits are permitted, and what is the process for getting these credits approved?
- ❖ If you're entering an applied program, ask how many hours you will be required to complete and when/where you will be completing them.
- ❖ Ask about potential registration fee as they differ from tuition waivers. Comment from Plunk: Previous students have said programs seem to dodge this question, but it is important to know as fees range from \$200-\$1800 per semester at different universities.
- ❖ Ask about average years it takes students to finish. Ask about the dropout rate, and why students have left.
- ❖ Ask about the comprehensive/qualifying exam process, or if they even do exams.

### Questions to Ask of Current Graduate Students in the Ph.D. program

- ❖ How would you describe the mentorship style of (your potential advisor)?
- ❖ How would you describe the relationship between the graduate students in the program?
- ❖ How would you describe the relationship between the faculty and the students?
- ❖ Have you felt supported in the program? By the advisor?
- ❖ What do you see as the biggest strength of this program/lab?
- ❖ What is the biggest frustration for students in this program/lab?
- ❖ If you could change anything about the program/lab, what would you like to see changed?
- ❖ If the graduate student is working with your potential advisor and they work in the community, ask how the relationships are with these partners? (not as gossip, but how engaged are the community members)

- ❖ Ask about potential registration fees as they differ from tuition waivers.
- ❖ Can you live comfortably in this town on the graduate stipend?
- ❖ How would you describe the lab/program culture? Among students and among students and faculty?
- ❖ In your opinion so far, how are the TA/RA experiences? Is it difficult to juggle both?
- ❖ What is something that the department could do to help reach your career goals?
- ❖ What kind of statistics resources are available through the university? (are they free for students?)
- ❖ How is your quality of life given the location, program, and funding?
- ❖ What kinds of things do you like doing in this town?
- ❖ If you're entering an applied program, ask the current students how they are accruing hours, keeping track of hours, balancing the hour requirements with other program requirements, etc.

### **BEING DEFERRED OR "PLACED ON HOLD"**

- ❖ Deferral until you gain experience
  - For example, some MBA programs will grant a deferral to an outstanding graduating senior applicant who needs to gain some practical experience before entering the program. In this case, the school has accepted you on the condition that you work for a couple of years before starting the MBA program.
- ❖ Deferral until you complete additional coursework
  - For example, if you are business major, but you are applying to a psychology graduate program, the school may defer your application until you take certain psychology courses to gain the necessary foundation for the program.
- ❖ Deferral due to deficiency in the application
  - Applicants may get deferred when they have deficiencies in their applications (e.g., GPA, admission tests scores).
  - The admission committee may examine more applications before they make a final decision on your application.
  - You can strengthen your credentials by sending (1) an additional letter of recommendation, (2) most recent grades (if unavailable when you submitted your application), or (3) a positive letter that re-confirms your interest.

### **BEING PLACED ON A WAIT LIST**

- ❖ The admissions office accepts a certain number of candidates from a large pool of applicants and attempts to estimate how many of these applicants will accept their offer of admission. How close they come to their target will determine how many applicants they can take off the wait list. In fact, if more applicants accept than predicted, the graduate school may not even pull a single candidate off its wait list.
- ❖ Improving your chances when "wait listed"
  - Read the school's instructions on its wait list carefully. Some programs send a form that you must fill out and return to the admissions office to remain on the wait list. If the school does not receive your form on time, the admissions office will take your name off the list.
  - Call the admissions office to find out (1) how many other candidates are on the wait list, (2) the school's process for reviewing and evaluating those candidates, and (3) when they plan to notify them.
  - Ask the office if additional information would enhance your chances of admission. If so, send materials that will strengthen your application (e.g., additional letter of recommendation, copy of your most recent transcript, letter re-confirming your interest in the school and highlighting any recent accomplishments). Some programs note in your application file that you called to inquire about your status.
  - Call the admissions office occasionally to inquire about your status.
  - Send a "thank you letter" that (1) thanks the committee for taking the time to interview you and (2) lets them know you are still very interested in the program.
  - Be polite and calm to everyone you speak to in the admissions office. Be patient.

### **IF NO ONE ADMITS YOU**

- ❖ Examine the reasons why you were not competitive. Was it a poorly written personal statement? Poor admission test scores? Lack of experience? Poor fit between you and the program? Did you apply to enough programs?
- ❖ If you are graduating, try to get a job in the field of interest.
- ❖ Take a graduate course at your local university on a non-degree basis just to keep your hand in and to show your commitment and ability.

**ADDITIONAL REFERENCES**

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- ❖ Prinstein, M. (2014). Mitch's uncensored advice for applying to graduate school in clinical psychology. Retrieved on October 21, 2016 from <http://mitch.web.unc.edu/files/2013/10/MitchGradSchoolAdvice.pdf>

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## RESOURCES

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**FUNDING RESOURCES****❖ Funding for graduate school**

- Determine if the graduate program has assistantships or fellowships. These often include tuition reimbursement and a stipend for either teaching an introductory-level course or working with a professor on a research project.
- Check into scholarships and fellowships that cover full or partial tuition.
- Contact the graduate school's admissions office, the career planning office, as well as campus newspaper and bulletin boards for information on where to locate job listings on campus.
- Check with financial aid office to make sure that you are aware of all the resources available for financial aid.

**❖ CSUN financial aid office:** <http://www.csun.edu/financialaid>**❖ Scholarships**

- Scholarships can be based on need (e.g., financial), qualifications (grades, skills), or some characteristic (e.g., ethnicity, employment, religion, parents' background).
- **CSUN Matador Scholarship Program** – financial need and academic excellence: <http://www.csun.edu/financialaid/csun>

**❖ Fellowships**

- Usually reserved for graduate students and not usually based on need.
- Usually based on qualifications (e.g., grades, skills).
- Sometimes have work requirements (e.g., research, internship, teaching).
- **Ford Foundation Fellowship Programs** was developed to increase ethnic and racial diversity of faculty in higher education. <http://sites.nationalacademies.org/pga/fordfellowships/>

**❖ Paid internships**

- California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC)  
<http://www.csun.edu/social-behavioral-sciences/social-work/california-social-work-education-center-calswec>
- Geriatric Social Work Education Consortium (GSWEC)  
<http://www.csun.edu/social-behavioral-sciences/social-work/geriatric-social-work-education-consortium-gswec>

**❖ Research and teaching assistantships** (usually come with a tuition fee waiver)

- Many graduate programs (especially Ph.D. programs) will offer research and teaching assistantships.
- The assistantships are usually for 20 hours a week.
- Often times, but not always, the assistantship will come with a tuition fee waiver.

**FUNDED MENTORING PROGRAMS FOR CSUN STUDENTS****❖ University Scholar** (i.e., students explore their fields of interest and develop mentoring relationships with faculty members) and **Presidential Scholar** (Students work closely with a faculty mentor on a scholarly project).

<http://www.csun.edu/financialaid/csun>

**❖ Building Infrastructure Leading to Diversity (BUILD) Promoting Opportunities for Diversity in Education and Research (PODER)**

- Undergraduate research training program where sophomores, juniors, and seniors take classes and work directly with professors on research projects that relate to health. <http://www.csun.edu/build-poder>

- ❖ **Minority Biomedical Research Support (MBRS)** – Pairs campus researchers with students from underrepresented communities who want to become research scientists. <http://www.csun.edu/~csunmore/>
- ❖ **Minority Access to Research Careers (MARC)** offers students an opportunity to participate in on-campus, long-term research projects, while receiving mentoring, research support, graduate school preparation support and a stipend to travel to scientific conferences to present their research results. <http://www.csun.edu/~csunmore/>

### CSU FUNDING RESOURCES

- ❖ **Sally Casanova California Pre-Doctoral Program** – increase the pool of potential CSU faculty by supporting doctoral aspirations of CSU students who have experienced economic and educational disadvantages. <http://www.calstate.edu/PreDoc/>
- ❖ **Chancellor's Doctoral Incentive Program** – provides student loans to a limited number of individuals pursuing full-time doctoral study at accredited universities throughout the United States
  - Seeks to provide loans to doctoral students who are interested in applying and competing for CSU instructional faculty positions after completion of the doctoral degree. <http://www.calstate.edu/hr/cdip/>

### SOME SUMMER RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY PROGRAMS (SROP)

- ❖ The HACU National Internship Program (HNIP): <http://www.hacu.net/hacu/HNIP.asp>
- ❖ Department of Education Internship: <http://www2.ed.gov/students/prep/job/intern/index.html>
- ❖ NIH Summer Internship Program: <https://www.training.nih.gov/>
- ❖ Google “Summer Research Program for Undergraduates”, and specific university programs will come up.

#### Useful Internet Sites for Potential Graduate Students

Webpage	Description
FinAid (Financial Aid Home Page) <a href="http://finaid.org">http://finaid.org</a>	Provides information about loans, scholarships, grants, and other types of grad school funds. In addition, information is provided about admission tests, college admissions, and career placement.
Educational Testing Service Network <a href="http://www.ets.org">http://www.ets.org</a>	Provides information and links to various admission tests (e.g., GMAT, GRE, TOEFL, PRAXIS), practice tests, scholarships, financial aid tools, tips, and resources
Minority On-line Information Service <a href="http://web.fie.com/web/mo">http://web.fie.com/web/mo</a>	Provides current information about historically Black colleges and universities and Hispanic-serving institutions
National Association of Graduate and Professional Studies (NAGPS) <a href="http://www.nagps.org">http://www.nagps.org</a>	Provides information on taxes, financial aid, benefits of membership, and regional/national conferences
FastWEB <a href="http://www.fastweb.com">http://www.fastweb.com</a>	Provides information on graduate fellowships and scholarships based upon your answers to an individual profile
Business School <a href="http://www.finaid.org/otheraid/business.phtml">http://www.finaid.org/otheraid/business.phtml</a>	Provides information about awards, loans, and advice specific to M.B.A. students, admissions testing, M.B.A. Explorer, GMAT, and loans
Law School <a href="http://www.finaid.org/otheraid/law.phtml">http://www.finaid.org/otheraid/law.phtml</a>	Provides information about awards, loans, and advice specific to law students, LSAT, admissions testing, Law School Admission Council Online
Medical School <a href="http://www.finaid.org/otheraid/medical.phtml">http://www.finaid.org/otheraid/medical.phtml</a>	Provides information about loans, professional organizations, and other resources specific to medical students, admissions testing page
Pre-Med Advisor <a href="http://medplaza.com/premed">http://medplaza.com/premed</a>	Provides information about financial aid for medical school and the MCAT
M.B.A. Explorer <a href="http://www.gmat.org">http://www.gmat.org</a>	The Graduate Management Administration Council (GMAC) provides information about graduate business schools, admissions and testing, and tips on financing your M.B.A.
US News & World Report.edu <a href="http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/beyond/bchome.htm">http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/beyond/bchome.htm</a>	Provides graduate school rankings in many disciplines, database of graduate scholarships, and an interactive “Answer Zone” for advice on graduate schools
National Center for Education Statistics (N.C.E.S.) <a href="http://www.nces.ed.gov">http://www.nces.ed.gov</a>	Provides statistical reports on student financing, student debt, enrollment in institutions of higher education, and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) section

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## RESUMES/VITAS

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- ❖ **How to develop a resume/vita**
  - [https://www.csun.edu/plunk/documents/resume\\_vita\\_development.pdf](https://www.csun.edu/plunk/documents/resume_vita_development.pdf)
- ❖ **Resume template**
  - <https://www.csun.edu/plunk/documents/resumetemplate2.docx>
- ❖ **Vita template**
  - [https://www.csun.edu/plunk/documents/vita\\_template.docx](https://www.csun.edu/plunk/documents/vita_template.docx)

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## REFERENCES

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### WHY REFERENCES ARE IMPORTANT

- ❖ References do not usually get you into the graduate program, but poorly chosen references can keep you from getting in if not properly groomed.
- ❖ References confirm and reinforce your personal and professional strengths.
- ❖ Referrals give instant credibility. They earn your resume additional time of scrutiny because references do not want to attach their name to a bad candidate.

What someone says about you has a much greater impact than what you say about yourself.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF EXCELLENT REFERENCES

- ❖ First, and foremost, your references need to know about your abilities/skills/attributes.
- ❖ The reference should be enthusiastic about helping you.
- ❖ Ideally, your reference will be successful, confident, and have good oral and written skills.
- ❖ The reference is someone whose letterhead, qualifications, and/or title will attract the recipient's attention or give credibility to you.
- ❖ Ideally, the reference will know the recipient of the letter and/or the recipient will know about the reference.

### GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING REFERENCES

- ❖ Make sure they have different last name than you.
  - If their last name is the same, then they should say they are not related to you when contacted or in the letter.
- ❖ Do not include letters from public officials, religious leaders, or lay people, unless they can attest first-hand to your academic or professional capabilities, research skills, etc.
- ❖ Always seek permission from references before listing them on an application or reference list.
  - Ask your references cordially and formally.
- ❖ If they agree to be a reference, then ask them what information they need (e.g., resume, career goal, transcript).
- ❖ It is acceptable to ask potential references if they can provide a **STRONG** recommendation.
  - If references hint they do not have much to say about you, they have a few concerns, or do not have time, then politely thank them and ask someone else. They may be hinting they are not comfortable being a reference.
- ❖ It is very likely you will need your references in the future, so stay in contact with your references.
  - After the application process is finished, follow up with a "thank you" card/email.
  - After you hear back from jobs/programs and/or make your decision, then thank your references and let them know the outcome.

### NURTURING ACADEMIC REFERENCES

- ❖ Develop a positive relationship with at least 3 or 4 of your professors.
- ❖ If you want a letter from a faculty member, do the following in class:
  - Make sure you score above the class average, and ideally make an "A" in the class.
  - Act professionally in class (e.g., be on time, attend class, be respectful of others' opinions, engage in class discussion and activities).

- ❖ Talk to them outside of class to help them tailor the letters with information beyond your class performance.
  - Stop by their office hours when you are in their class; this will help them connect a name to the face.
  - Ask for their advice on education and career.
  - After you leave their class, maintain contact with the professors so they remember who you are (e.g., occasional update email, stopping by their office).
- ❖ Advise and thank all references for being a reference and also at the end of the process.
- ❖ Plunk's opinion: I believe it is the responsibility of faculty members to be available to write letters for students. However, I also believe it is their responsibility to be honest when composing the letter. So, if you received a good grade in the class, but you came in late to every class, then expect the letter to represent both characteristics.

## LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL

- ❖ Letters of reference are not necessarily a high priority for your references; therefore, make the process as easy as possible for your references.
- ❖ In general, the best references for graduate programs are current or past professors.
- ❖ At least 2 letters should be from faculty members who can attest to your potential to succeed in graduate school.
  - The best letters are from faculty members who have had considerable contact with you, especially in a non-classroom setting, and/or worked with you professionally.
    - Examples: served as your academic advisor, supervised you on a research project, co-authored a paper or conference presentation with you, served as an adviser to you in your role as an officer in a campus organization, worked with you on a community project.
  - Ideally, your academic references will be an assistant professor, associate professor, or full professor.
  - If you get a letter from a part-time faculty member, it is best if they at least have the level of degree for which you are applying (e.g., at least a master's degree for a master's program, or a Ph.D. for a Ph.D. program).
  - Try to avoid getting letters from graduate student teaching assistants or graduate student research supervisors.
- ❖ Some graduate programs (e.g., social work) require a letter from a faculty member and a current/past supervisor.
  - If you have work or volunteer experience in the field, have a current or past supervisor write one of the letters.
- ❖ Do not wait until the last minute to ask for letters. Ask references well before any deadlines; at least 4-6 weeks before the application is due.
  - Note from Plunkett: *I write 400-500 letters from October to March for about 40-60 students. Thus, the earlier you get me all the information and links (for online letters), the more likely I will be able to complete the letters on time.*
- ❖ Get all information to the references at least a month ahead of the deadline(s).
- ❖ Tell your references the deadline when you need the letters.
  - For online submissions, let them know the exact date. Many online submissions will also inform the letter writer of the due date.
  - For letters that need to be picked up, ask for the letters before the official deadline since you will need to coordinate picking up the letter(s), and then deliver the letter to the program.
- ❖ Prepare a packet to help your references write your letters of recommendation. Include the following:
  - Your full name
  - A one-page letter to your reference with very brief and clear instructions. Your letter should include:
    - A reminder of your relationship with the reference, such as:
      - What classes you had with the references, when you had them, and what grades you received.
      - The number of hours/semesters you worked with them, what duties you performed.
    - What type of program you are applying to and why you selected that type of program.
    - Statement of career interests and goals
    - A description of your strengths and why you think you will be successful in a graduate program
    - Special skills or talents related to the program.
    - A description of your weaknesses and how you are addressing the limitations (e.g., taking statistics class).
  - A statement of purpose / personal statement
  - A resume or vita
  - A copy of your GRE scores (if applicable)
  - Copies of your transcripts, along with your GPA (overall, major, minor) and relevant courses.
  - Reference forms and/or guidelines.

- Forms should be filled out completely (including the reference's name, address, affiliation, etc.); except for the reference's signature and ratings.
- Waive your rights to read the letter or form. Recipients place more credence in letters that are not read by students. If you are in doubt about the kind of recommendation the reference will write, then ask.
- Provide a form that list all programs, the title of the university and program, deadlines, and, if appropriate the professor and description of the program and lab for each school. (see table below)
  - Make deadlines very clear – put the earliest one at the top.
  - Also, note if the letter is to be given to you or to the school.

Sample of Completed Form to Provide to Your References

University	Program	Degree	Forms	Address if Hard Copy	Deadline	Delivery
California State University Northridge	Marriage and Family Therapy	Masters	No	Selection Committee 18111 Nordhoff Street Educational Psychology & Counseling Northridge, CA 91330	12/01/07	Mail to school
University of California Los Angeles	Clinical Psychology	Ph.D.	Yes	Jane Smith, Ph.D. Director of Psychology, UCLA 100 Westwood Blvd. Los Angeles, CA 90000	11/15/07	I will pick up
Alliant International University	Clinical Psychology	PsyD	No	Not applicable	1/21/08	Online

Note: The name of the university, degree, and program should be exact since (1) references will likely copy and paste from your form, or (2) use a mail merge to put the information into the letter they write. Thus, don't abbreviate (e.g., Cal State Northridge).

- ❖ If you are applying to multiple programs, submit your materials to the programs around the same time. This way, your references are not getting email links spread-out across weeks or months.
  - Note from Plunkett: *When I complete references from students, I want to complete them all at once for that student. This helps me plan my time and keeps me organized. When the reference requests come sporadically, it is much easier for me to miss a deadline. Thus, if you are applying for multiple programs spread out over a couple of months (e.g., November 15 to January 1 deadlines), then submit your online letter requests in the same week. This saves me a lot of time writing the letters if I can open up all the information on you at once, and then focus just on letters for you. Thus, I don't have to reopen your letter, form, transcript, etc. each time I am writing a new letter. Also, if I have letter requests trickling in every few days or weeks, it also makes it more challenging for me to find time to do your letters.*
- ❖ Provide pre-addressed envelopes or peel off labels and postage if they need to mail reference letters.
- ❖ Send a short, polite, and friendly reminder about the deadline one week before the letters are due.
- ❖ Send a friendly reminder the day before letters are due.
  - Note from Plunkett: *Some letter writers do not want to be reminded of the deadlines; they find the reminders to be annoying. Unfortunately, these are often faculty who submit their recommendations at the last minute, which can be very stressful to the student. I would ask each reference if they want to be reminded, and if not, when they usually submit the recommendations so as to relieve any stress you might get from waiting.*

## WHAT MAKES A GOOD REFERENCE LETTER?

- ❖ Addresses your unique attributes, skills, accomplishments, etc. (not generic).
- ❖ Persuasive and enthusiastic language.
- ❖ Accurate spelling and good grammar.
  - Note: Sometimes a reference will let you read the letter they wrote. If you notice spelling and grammar errors, then it is okay to make some suggestions (but be nice).
- ❖ Each should be a signed original.
- ❖ Preferably, the reference letter is personalized to the specific individual who has the authority to hire you.
- ❖ Get a reference signed by your current employer if leaving.
- ❖ Many references will let (and some prefer) you write your own reference letter on their letterhead and then they modify and sign it.
- ❖ If the reference knows the target, then you can write your own midsection (known as the value paragraph) where your attributes are advertised, while the reference writes the opening and closing paragraphs.

**SAMPLE REFERENCE LETTER****JOE N. COLLEGE**

12345 Street Address • City, ST 00000 • (123) 456-7890 • email@whatever.com

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January 1, 2000

John Smith, Ph.D.  
Department Chair  
Philosophy Department  
XYZ University  
Anywhere, USA 00000

Dear Dr. Smith:

It gives me great pleasure to write a letter of recommendation for Joe N. College. I became acquainted with Joe when he began his master's program in the Philosophy Department in 1993. As the Philosophy Program Department Chair, I supervised Joe's teaching and academic performance. Also, I taught a class in which Joe was a student, and I have observed his presentations to student groups. My affiliation with Joe in these various settings has allowed me to observe him closely.

Joe has consistently presented himself in a professional and dedicated manner in each of his various roles – instructor, lecturer, and student. He was a very popular and respected instructor as evidenced by his outstanding teacher evaluations. He has an exciting and charismatic presentation style in the classroom, as well as during guest lectures, which keeps the students interested in the material he is covering. As a student, Joe excelled in his course work as demonstrated by his outstanding grades in my class (i.e., 97%, top score) and his excellent grade point average (i.e., 3.97).

Joe has many skills and personal attributes that make him an excellent candidate for the assistant professor position. He has good research and writing skills as evidenced by his two publications at such an early stage of his professional development. Joe has a commitment to service to the Department and College as exhibited by his roles as member of the Faculty Search Committee, Vice-President of the Graduate Student Senate, and member of the College Fundraising Committee. Joe recently defended his thesis, and according to his research and thesis supervisor, he is already preparing it for submission to a scholarly journal.

Because of his research and teaching skills, scholarship, and personal attributes, it is my sincere belief that Joe N. College will be very successful in a Ph.D. program. It is for the above reasons that I whole-heartedly recommend him for the Ph.D. in Blank at XYZ University. If you have any questions concerning his qualifications, feel free to contact me at (123) 456-7890.

Sincerely,

John Smith, Ph.D.