

## General Grad School Information

PhD vs. Masters:

- *PhD:*
  - o Interested in research? Loved the 30X series? PhD program is likely for you!
  - o If your career interests include being an admin, professor, or researcher, you need a PhD.
    - You can be a professor at a community college with an experimental master's degree, however.
  - o Ensure the program is APA accredited
- *Masters:*
  - o Hated research? Want to work directly with patients in the field? Do a master's program!
  - o Ensure the program is CACREP accredited.
  - o Counseling programs are commonly in the "school of education" for other universities.
  - o *Three levels of licensure:* Social worker, MFT, and/or clinical mental health counselor.
    - School counselors are certified through a school- separate program
  - o Process: 2+ years of grad school with practicum, work under supervision for a few years, then take a licensing test (and pass) to practice therapy.
- Overall:
  - o Master's programs can help you get into a PhD program, especially when it's through the same university. This is a good option for those who aren't sure if they want to commit to a five-year PhD program.
    - However, many PhD programs make you start from scratch even if you earned a master's and are continuing on.
  - o Ask about the practicum, not just the course content!
  - o Master's programs have less funding than PhD
  - o Grad school requires you have a 3.0 GPA

Grad program sources:

- The APA [website](#) has a list of accredited PhD programs in the U.S.
- There's an APA published book with info about grad psych programs in the U.S. There's a copy of the book available to read in AIC 453. [More info here.](#)
- AMHCA: National database for programs

Applications:

- You should consider multiple things when applying for grad programs:
  1. *Program-* Does the program cater to your interests?
    - a. Is it APA or CACREP accredited? For the sake of ease, ensure it is.
  2. *Location-* Can you see yourself living in the area for 2+ years?
  3. *Funding-*
    - a. No program should come completely out of your pocket!
    - b. Programs will/should tell you if there's tuition waving in exchange for RA and TA work.
    - c. Need-based financial aid loans (FAFSA)
    - d. Scholarships

*Information provided by guest lecturers, Dr. Olvera, Dr. Byrne, and Dr. Lemm.*

*Document created by Sam Hogan in affiliation with the WWU Psych Club (April 2022)*

- e. Public service loan forgiveness program: If you work in social services or with a nonprofit for 10 years, your loans (full maybe partial) can be forgiven.
- f. Some employers will pay for you to continue your education
- g. Master's programs have less funding than PhD
- 4. *Professors*- When you apply, grad programs ask that you indicate what professors you're interested in studying under. Ensure that their areas of interest and current research align with yours.
  - a. Universities will ask what your area of interest is to ensure it matches that of the professors you list.
    - i. This is more detailed than simply "Developmental Psychology" (i.e., gender development, prosocial behavior in adolescents, etc.).
    - ii. You don't have to be entirely certain, and your interests may change.
  - b. Research professors by looking at their research in Psychinfo; Take a look at universities' list of staff and go from there.
  - c. During research projects in your courses keep track of researchers that have published articles you're interested in.
- *What are grad schools looking for in applicants?*
  - o Education- Did you complete the appropriate undergraduate degree?
  - o Research and/or work experience: *More info later*
    - Most undergraduates take 1+ gap years to gain research and/or clinical experience before applying for any grad program.
  - o Recommendation letters: *More info later*
  - o Applicants who don't explain their entire life story or talk about who they *were*. They want to know who you are *now* and *how* your experiences shaped you. Why do you want to work in *this* field?

#### Recommendation letters:

- Professors will not write letters unless they know you personally, not just academically.
  - o Be sure to give adequate time for professors to write the letters. *At least two weeks'* notice.
    - If you're taking a gap year, tell your professor this. Some grad applications require letters to have been written within a certain time frame. Professors will write a document with notes to themselves about you, so that they can write a letter in the future.
  - o Go to office hours to build a relationship with profs
    - Ask them about their academic journey. This could help inspire your own!
- Don't get character references (i.e., your family friend, mother, etc.), get academic ones speaking to your work ethic (i.e., clinical or volunteer supervisors, professors, etc.)
- Universities want to know what kind of a worker you are (and person).

#### Research:

- As an undergraduate student, you can participate in professors' labs
  - o Select professors that research in your areas of interest and email them to ask about RA positions available within their lab.

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- RA positions are in exchange for upper-level course credits (number of credits and hours of work per week vary).
- If you have an idea for a research project, you can ask a professor to advise your project.
- Involvement in research is important to experimental and PhD programs.
  - Present your research- Psychfest is a great opportunity!
  - Show that you have an interest in research- distinguish yourself from other applicants.

#### Teaching Assistance:

- There are *some* TA opportunities available to you as an undergraduate.
  - These can be very competitive, professors will likely choose TAs with higher GPAs, students they're familiar with, and students who have completed the class before.
- TA work is in exchange for upper-level course credits (1 to 3 credits). As such, hours dedicated to TA-ing can range from 1 to 9 hours per week.
- Each quarter, needs for TAs will likely be announced and/or posted via Canvas. You can also email professors you enjoyed taking a course with and ask for availabilities.

#### Suggestions:

- Figure out how to balance work and leisure *now*, not in the midst of your career or grad school. Counseling is taxing, you have to develop professional boundaries to prevent burn-out and trauma.
  - Advocate for yourself and **practice self-care**.
  - There are [counseling and wellness services](#) available through WWU
- RA and/or TA *now!* Even if you're on the fence about PhD programs, RA just in case.
  - Only RA and/or TA if you can manage this with your life and course load. Each person's path is different.
- *Ask questions!* Every professor is more than happy to share their own grad school journey and answer your questions. Take advantage of your advisor, your peers, and your professors!
- Gain experience in helper roles- behavior technician, work at hospitals, work as closely as you can in research or counseling.
  - [Volunteer](#): Work with nonprofits, social work, etc. Look for opportunities that provide training.
    - [Psych Club](#) is a great resource for this!

### Grad School at WWU

Three grad programs are available: Experimental, [school counseling](#), and clinical counseling.

#### WWU clinical mental health grad program: Masters

- Typically accepts 6 students each year- Highly competitive.
  - Small cohort of students that move through the program together.
- Includes two years of full-time grad school during which a solid foundation in counseling is formed.
  - NO thesis is required (typical in all counseling programs)
  - Program isn't a good fit for those hoping to do part-time schooling.
- Program provides clinical services to the community free of charge (*not WWU students*).

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- Students work with real people under the *intensive* supervision of trained professionals (often professors).

WWU experimental grad program: Masters or PhD (more competitive)

- Master's program is two years (*sometimes* longer, if a student needs it)
  - Your thesis is completed in your final year.
- Experimental degree won't let you practice counseling.
- Degree completed is in psychology *in general*- not a specific area.
  - You can get a degree in psych with a focus on an area of psychology (e.g., social, neuro., development, cognitive).
    - When you're matched with an advisor during admissions, their area of interest will (should) match yours.
- Doesn't require a GRE score
  - Many universities are moving away from requiring a GRE
- Admittance:
  - Typically, 6-8 people accepted per admission process
  - At any given point there are about 15 people in the experimental program
  - Designed to move with a cohort of classmates. You start and graduate at the same time.
    - Sometimes students need a little extra time to graduate.

Financial assistance at WWU:

- No WWU grad program has enough funding to provide *full* financial support to students.
- TA positions help cover tuition (either FT- 20 hrs/week or PT- 10 hrs/week)
  - Some TA positions are available outside of the psychology department
  - You may be given a quarterly stipend for your TA work (~\$5,000).
- Scholarship opportunities externally and through WWU that are specific to grad students.
- Experimental program:
  - The first five quarters include nearly FT course work (the final quarter is dedicated to thesis work), as such, they have funding (TA work) available during this time.
- Counseling programs:
  - More expensive, overall, than the experimental program.