General Grad School Information

PhD vs. Masters:

- **PhD:**
  - Interested in research? Loved the 30X series? PhD program is likely for you!
  - 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.
  - Ensure the program is APA accredited

- **Masters:**
  - Hated research? Want to work directly with patients in the field? Do a master’s program!
  - Ensure the program is CACREP accredited.
  - Counseling programs are commonly in the “school of education” for other universities.
  - *Three levels of licensure:* Social worker, MFT, and/or clinical mental health counselor.
    - School counselors are certified through a school- separate program
  - 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:
  - 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.
  - Ask about the practicum, not just the course content!
  - Master’s programs have less funding than PhD
  - 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 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 excepts 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).
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.