

Road Map to Graduate School in Social and Personality Psychology: A Guide for Students by Students

Prepared by the SPSP Graduate Student Committee 2017-2018



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Section 1: Overview of the Road Map

Introduction to Road Map

This road map is a guide for undergraduates and post-graduates who want to go to graduate school for social or personality psychology. We provide advice and resources for each stage of the application process, from deciding what type of degree to pursue to how to navigate interviews.

Deciding to Apply and Where to Apply

- An important decision that you must make early on in your application process is what type of social or personality psychology program you would like to apply to: a PhD or Masters. In order to help you answer this question, we offer three considerations. Ideally, you should decide to apply at least one year from the application due date, and decide where to apply within 6 to 12 months from the application due date. See “Checklist for Applying to PhD Programs in Social and Personality Psychology” or “Checklist for Applying to MA and MS Programs in Social and Personality Psychology” for a suggested timeline.
 1. This decision should be guided by your career goals.
 - a. If you would like to be a *professor* at a research university or a teaching-focused institution, or if you would like to be a *research scientist* in private industry, at a non-profit, or in government, who chooses research questions, designs studies, and trains other researchers, then a PhD program will serve your goals.
 - b. If you would like to be a *data scientist*, user experience researcher, or other research expert in private industry, then a PhD may also be the right path for you.
 - c. If you would like to *work on a research team* or take a position in an academic or non-academic setting, then a Master’s program might be more appropriate for you.
 2. Another important consideration is whether you are competitive for PhD programs and whether you have the research skills and basic knowledge to succeed in a PhD program.
 - a. PhD applicants should have a specific research interest, and should be knowledgeable on the topic and be familiar with the methods of research they will use to pursue their research interest.
 - b. If you or a mentor think you could benefit from additional training or school before entering a PhD program, you might consider taking a job as a research assistant or completing a master’s program. If you do not have a specific research interest and/or are not knowledgeable on a topic yet, you may also consider taking a job as a research assistant or completing a master’s program.
 3. A final consideration when deciding between different types of programs is finances.
 - a. PhD programs are typically funded (meaning that students pay no tuition and receive a monthly stipend for most or all of the year), MA and MS programs vary in their scholarship and fellowship opportunities. Some MA and MS programs offer scholarships and stipends commensurate with PhD programs, which may or may not be merit-based, others offer more modest scholarships and stipends, and some do not offer any scholarships or stipends.
- Once you have decided on the type of program you will apply for (or whether you are applying to both PhD and MA or MS programs), you should aim to compile a list of 15-20+ programs based on their match with your academic record, research experience, research interests, and career goals.
- One of the *most important criteria* for deciding where to apply (and for being accepted into a program) is a strong fit between your research interests and the research interests of potential mentors. Start by doing a thorough search to identify professors who share your

research interests, read journal articles, talk to those in the field, and attend conferences if possible.

- For programs on this initial list, review the program website and the research interests of other faculty members. Identify programs where your research interests are compatible with 2-3 potential mentors, as an interest in working with multiple faculty will boost your likelihood of attracting interest from at least one of them.
- Contact potential mentors to see whether they are accepting a new student during the next application cycle. If not, cut that potential mentor from your list. See the “Checklist’s” for a suggested timeline.
- Narrow down your list with the goal of applying to 8-12 schools. It is common to apply to a high number of PhD programs.

Understanding Criteria and Acceptance Rates

- An excellent source of information about specific programs is the American Psychological Association (APA) graduate program reference book: *Graduate Study in Psychology* (which retails for about \$30). The book has an online resource with the same information, *Graduate Study Online*: <http://www.apa.org/pubs/databases/gradstudy/index.aspx>. You can purchase a three-month subscription for \$20.
- Individual program websites provide many of the same statistics from the APA’s book as well as information about stipends and other financial information (e.g., tuition for non-funded programs), graduation requirements, courses that are commonly offered, the names of affiliated faculty members, and information about currently enrolled students and recent graduates.
- Students should make note of any requirements (e.g., minimum GRE math score, minimum GPA), but also the statistics that describe recent admissions cycles, including the median GRE score and mean GPA of admitted students and the acceptance rate. These statistics can help you estimate how competitive the program is and how likely you are to be accepted, and they can indicate how popular the program is and how selective it is.
- Your scores are only a small part of your application. Typically, these minimums are imposed for internal administrative **purposes**.

Section 2: Applying to PhD Programs

Preparation (Winter before application year or earlier)

- Expose yourself to the variety of research methods and topics in social and personality psychology. Find out the research interests of faculty at your undergraduate institution, read research articles, and make acquaintance with faculty and graduate students in social and personality psychology.
- Take courses in social or personality psychology, ideally with professors whose research interests align with yours. Ask if you can assist with their research.
- Gain research experience and develop a relationship with at least one social/personality faculty researcher who can serve as a mentor and reference letter writer.
- Take one or more courses in statistics.
- Obtain general information about PhD programs in social and personality psychology, including how long they typically take, what the graduation requirements are, and what careers PhDs in social and personality psychology have.
- Identify specific programs and researchers that fit your aims and interests.
- Cultivate relationships with additional potential letter writers (programs typically require 3 letters total).
- Undergraduates should apply for summer research jobs in other labs (e.g., SPSP SPUR program).

Spring before Application Year

- Solidify your own research interests and career goals.
- Learn more about specific programs that seem to be a good match for you, and identify faculty whose research is of interest to you. Visit their website or email them to see whether they are taking students in the next application cycle.
- Create info packets for your top 10 social and personality programs, which include: faculty member(s) you are interested in working with and their specific interests, several recent publications authored by those faculty members, admission criteria for each program (GRE scores, GPA, etc.), application and application fees.
- Prepare to take the GRE by learning about it, getting preparation materials and books, deciding whether to take a preparation course, and registering to take the test on a specific date (no later than September). Some programs require applicants to take the GRE subject test; therefore, you should check program websites for this information.
- Identify fellowship and scholarship programs that you may qualify for by doing research online and speaking with your faculty mentor and graduate students in social/personality psychology. Programs for social/personality PhD students include: the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship Program, and the Ford Foundation Predoctoral Fellowship.

Fall and Winter of Application Year

- See “Checklist for Applying to PhD Programs in Social and Personality Psychology”.

Summer before Starting a Program

- Read research articles written by your mentor or relevant to your area of research. It may be most useful to start with their five most recent research articles, but also search for their seminal papers (if applicable). It may also be possible to obtain summer funding to do research with your faculty advisor before the academic year begins.

- Read books to prepare for graduate school in social and personality psychology (e.g., How to Write a Lot, The Professor is In, The Compleat Academic).
- With guidance from your mentor, hone specific skills that will help you (e.g., take a [Coursera](#) course that will introduce you to the statistical software you will use).

Checklist for Applying to PhD Programs in Social and Personality Psychology*		
# of Months Out from Application Due Date	Tasks Due	Done?
13+ months out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coursework • Seek Research and/or Applied Opportunities (depending on interests) • Join Research Lab or Secure/Complete Internship 	
11-12 months out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide to Apply • Search for Programs 	
9-10 months out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue Program Search • Begin to Finalize List • Begin GRE Prep 	
7-8 months out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft CV (get feedback) • Continue GRE Prep (take a practice test) 	
5-6 months out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalize Program List • Organize Program List using Excel (see Section 3 for tips) • Draft Personal Statement (get feedback) • Edit CV • Sign up for GRE (take by October of Application year; but summer is best in case you need to take it again) • Request Letters of Recommendation (initial request should be early as professors need advance notice) • Begin Contacting Faculty of Interest (e.g., email potential mentors, introduce yourself at conferences, have mentors introduce you and/or put in a good word for you) 	
3-4 months out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start Online Applications • Request Transcripts • Request GRE scores (or take GRE again, if needed) • Revise Personal Statement • Finalize CV • Follow up with Letter Writers • Prepare Packets for Letter Writers • Gather Information of Program Funding 	
1-2 months out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete and Send Applications • Follow up on Transcripts • Follow up with GRE Scores • Follow up with Letter Writers • Follow up with Faculty Mentors of Interest (if needed) 	
Apps Due		
1 month after	Application Review	
1-3 months after	Interview Invitations	
1-5 months after	Decisions (Offers, Waitlists, Rejections)	
6+ months after	Getting Ready to Start the Program	
*Note. The above timeline is a suggestion to help prepare students and complete application in a timely manner.		

Section 3: Applying to Terminal Master's Programs

Searching for Programs

- Read each program description very carefully. In some programs, students work directly with an adviser, and others admit students without an advisor.
- For programs that require advisers, email your prospective mentors well before applying to make sure that they are accepting students for the academic year for which you are applying. (**Note.* If you are interested in a research career, a program with an adviser would be ideal.)

Consider Your Future Plans

- Is a Master's degree your stepping-stone to a PhD program? Do you want a program that requires the completion of a Master's thesis? Do you need a program that will prepare you directly for the work field? Answers to these questions will help you to narrow down the programs for which you apply.
 - a. **Stepping Stone to PhD:** If a Master's degree is your stepping stone to PhD, make sure to find a program that is research oriented and will allow you to complete a thesis. However, keep in mind that when applying to PhD programs, some programs may require you to complete a second thesis as part of their curriculum (while others may forgo that step if they find your Master's thesis up to par).
 - b. **Immediate Work:** If you are more interested in a Master's program that will prepare you for immediate work after graduation, look for programs that will prepare you for your chosen field (through clinical licensing, internship placement, teaching opportunities, etc.).

Deadline Reminders

- Terminal Master's application deadlines tend to be later than PhD programs (generally in the spring time between February and May), which means you can delay taking the GRE if necessary, but be sure to take it at least 2-3 months prior to your application deadlines to give yourself time to re-take the test if necessary.
- Some applications will allow you to submit GRE scores after the deadline if you are signed up for a specific date and send your scores to the program immediately, but this is something to be verified on a program-by-program basis.

Admission Requirements

- Admission requirements for Master's programs tend to be more lenient than those for PhD programs. As always, this depends on the program in question, but lower GPA/GRE scores/less research experience is not as big of a hindrance to acceptance to a terminal Master's program. Generally, Master's programs do not require the GRE subject test, but as always, check the program website.

Costs and Funding Opportunities

- Unlike PhD programs, Master's programs are typically not funded. In most cases, students must have their own financial resources to cover the cost of tuition, fees, and supplies; however, there may be some cases when funding is available. The cost of tuition for Master's programs varies greatly, with some costing less than \$10,000 and some costing upwards of \$20,000. In 2016, the American Psychological Association (APA) conducted a survey of individuals who completed Master's or Doctoral programs within the past 10 years. On average, the debt associated with a Master's degree in psychology was \$60,000.

See this link for more information: <http://www.apa.org/education/grad/faqs.aspx> .

- When searching for Master's programs, look for funding opportunities through the department as well as the University. There may be assistantships (teaching or research), fellowships, or small scholarships available. Contact the program director and/or your potential advisor to inquire about the types of assistance available to graduate students.
- There may also be opportunities for external funding through the APA (or other related organizations). The APA awards website allows users to search for scholarships and grants exclusively for social and personality psychology. See this link for APA awards page: <http://www.apa.org/about/awards/index.aspx> . An alternative funding option is applying for financial aid through FAFSA. Some students may be eligible for grants whereas others may need to take out loans.

Checklist for Applying to MA and MS Programs for Social and Personality Psychology		
# of Months Out from Application Due Date	Tasks Due	Done?
9-10 months out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decide to Apply (start thinking about this in the Fall, if your deadline is Spring/May; start thinking about this in the Spring, if your deadline is Fall/December) Seek Research and/or Applied Opportunities (depending on interests) Finish Coursework (if degree not finished) Search for Programs Begin GRE Prep 	
7-8 months out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue Program Search Draft CV (get feedback) Continue GRE Prep (take a practice test) 	
5-6 months out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalize Program List Organize Program List using Excel (see Section 3 for tips) Draft Personal Statement (get feedback) Edit CV Take GRE (take at least two months before applications are due; earlier is better in case you need to take again) Request Letters of Recommendation (initial request should be early as professors need advance notice) Begin Contacting Faculty of Interest (e.g., email potential mentors, introduce yourself at conferences, have mentors introduce you and/or put in a good word for you) 	
3-4 months out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start Online Applications Request Transcripts Request GRE scores (or take GRE again, if needed) Revise Personal Statement Finalize CV Follow up with Letter Writers Prepare Packets for Letter Writers Gather Information on Program Funding 	
1-2 months out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete and Send Applications Follow up on Transcripts Follow up with GRE Scores Follow up with Letter Writers Follow up with Faculty Mentors of Interest (if needed) 	
Apps Due		
1 month after	Application Review Time	
1-5 months after	Interview Invitations (sometimes) OR Decisions (Offers, Waitlists, Rejections)	
6+ months after	Getting Ready to Start the Program	
* This is a general application timeline; your timeline and tasks may differ depending on your background and applications.		

Section 4: Important Application Criteria

Research Experience

- Graduate programs want to see that you have been involved in hands-on research, through interacting with participants, designing and implementing research, conducting data analysis and data management, presenting a poster at a meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology or a local social or personality conference, experience with manuscript preparation, completing an honor's thesis, etc.
- Ideally, your research experience will not be limited to one project. The earlier you start assisting in research, the more skills and experience you can obtain. Those who do not get thorough research experience during their undergraduate career should consider taking a gap year or two before applying to graduate school to accumulate research experience and hone research interests. Please see "Miscellaneous Advice" for more information.

Recommendation Letters

- When asking for recommendation letters, remember the following tips:
 - a. Make the process as easy as possible for your letter writers, who are likely very busy and have many other letters to write and submit. Ask your letter writers at least two months before the earliest letter deadline, and provide them with detailed information at least one month prior to the deadline. See "Checklist" tables for guidance.
 - b. Request letters from people who can write strong, positive statements of support. Your letter writers should know you, and should have specific, genuine, and positive information to share about you and your research experience, skills, professionalism, and qualifications for graduate school. Detailed illustrations of your strengths are more effective than bland generalities. If concerned, you can ask whether the potential letter writer could write a positive letter.

Personal Statement

- When writing a personal statement, remember the following tips:
 - a. A strong personal statement will clearly describe what you want to study, why you want to study it, and will demonstrate that you have the skills and knowledge necessary to study it. It will also show why the specific mentor/s you are interested in are a good fit.
 - b. Check each program's requirements for personal statements (word limits, inclusionary criteria, deadlines, etc.). Some programs require more than one personal statement, while some programs also require you to answer a series of short-answer questions.
 - c. Use this space to make yourself more personable to the admissions committee. Include a personal story that ties your research interests and experiences together. *Stay away from subjects that may turn the admissions committee off of your application (e.g., your personal mental health).*
 - d. Think of yourself as a salesperson. Give detailed information about your accomplishments, and do not assume that readers are familiar with every other part of your application packet. Your personal statement should communicate that you are a great candidate for the program to which you are applying by repeating and elaborating on the accomplishments listed on your CV. Your statement should emphasize your readiness for graduate school by clearly stating how your experiences have prepared you. It should also communicate your potential to succeed by demonstrating your interest in a specific topic and motivation to study it.

- e. Utilize the many sample personal statements you can find online, through the APA website, etc. Request the application materials of graduate students you know.

GRE Scores

- Programs generally do not state GRE score cut-offs but will instead report the average GRE section scores of their latest cohorts. Generally, you will be competitive if your scores are in at least the 50th percentile for Masters programs, and at least the 70th percentile for PhD programs. See “Helpful Resources” in Section 6 for GRE resources.
- Some programs require or recommend taking the Psychology GRE subject test.

GPA

- Most programs report the average GPA of recent cohorts rather than listing a specific cutoff. Programs may report the average GPA of recent cohorts, while some may provide suggested cut-offs. This information can help you gauge whether or not you are within the range of accepted students.

Mentors

- Cultivating mentors at your undergraduate institution and elsewhere will strengthen your application and set you up to be a successful graduate student. Forming relationships with faculty and graduate student mentors can connect you to research experiences, give you access to information and opportunities, and broaden your network (which will be useful to you throughout your career). Gaining the confidence and trust of a faculty member will earn you a strong recommendation letter, which is an essential component of your application.

Undergraduate Coursework

- Some programs require specific undergraduate courses for admittance, while others simply require a certain number of psychology course credits (~18 credits).
- Your transcript will ideally also include breadth psychology courses (e.g., a cognitive course, a neuroscience course), methods and statistics, and advanced seminars in social and personality psychology.

Teaching Assistantships

- Any experience working with students (through tutoring, lab assisting, teaching assisting, etc.) can reflect well on your future teaching abilities.

Extracurricular Activities

- Showing leadership and the ability to supervise/lead teams can translate well into a research program.
- Involvement in psychology organizations (e.g., Psi Chi) and membership in professional psychology organizations (e.g., SPSP) will not only boost your CV but also provide you with many opportunities and resources you may not hear about otherwise (e.g., scholarships, awards, student committees).

Section 5: Application Evaluation

Why Your Personal Statement Matters

- If you ask many undergraduate students what they think is most important for getting into graduate school, the most frequent responses will be GPA and GRE scores. Though both are important, other aspects of your application carry much greater weight. One particularly important component of your application – and one that you should spend a great deal of time working on – is your personal statement.
- The personal statement is a narrative description of your goals and previous experiences. It is not all about *you*, and in this way, is very unlike personal essays for undergraduate applications. Instead, your personal statement should relate to the program or professor you are applying to work with. Although a professor may get a kick out of your passion (*pro tip: avoid the word “passionate” in a cover letter or personal statement*), professors are interested in how you will help them and their research. Professors want to succeed just as much as you do, so make sure you let the professor know that you are motivated to bring new ideas and vigor to their own interests.
- Many programs do not have any standard protocol for the length, format, or even content of these essays. Some programs may ask for a single document detailing your personal interests and research experience, whereas others require two separate documents: a personal statement and a separate essay about your research experience. Be sure to adhere to each program’s specific requirements. Occasionally, programs may not post this information online, and you may have to begin the application before you find a description of the personal statement formatting requirements.

Why Your Letters of Recommendation Matter

- While your personal statement is an opportunity to learn more about you, professors also want to know what others have to say about you. Graduate professors may weight letters of recommendation highest when deciding whether to accept a student. A letter carries more weight if it is written by someone with a PhD who holds a faculty position in a social or personality psychology program, and if it is written by someone whose work the letter reader is familiar with or someone they know personally.
- If your undergraduate and post-graduate experiences were not in social or personality psychology, you will be most successful if your letters are from faculty members who work in related fields and whose work is relevant to your proposed topic of study (e.g., consumer behavior, management, behavioral economics, developmental psychology, cognitive psychology, clinical psychology, psycholinguistics, and neuroscience). Your personal statement should bridge the connection between your proposed topic of study and the experiences you had with any letter writers outside of social and personality psychology.
- The letter of recommendation is the opportunity for others to write all the things that you cannot say about yourself. In most cases, you will never get to read these letters, so writers include what they feel is appropriate for the reader to know. You will never know if your acceptance or rejection into a program was due to something your letter writer included.
- Be sure that you get letters of recommendation from people who can write positively about you. Try to get letters from professors with PhDs in Social or Personality Psychology, rather than from employers outside academia. A common mistake is to ask the professor of that class you loved, despite them not knowing who you are. No professor wants to write a bad letter of recommendation, but if they do not have anything positive to say, their letter is not going to help (in fact, it might hurt, because the reader will wonder why you didn’t get someone who was more fond of you). If you do not have positive relationships with any

- professors, start visiting their office hours and discuss their research.
- If you have spent some time working before applying to graduate school, think carefully about how you might compile letters of recommendation. Programs tend to place more weight on recommendations from professors than from bosses or mentors outside the academia. If you have lost touch with professors from your undergraduate years, consider reestablishing contact now. Remind them of how they knew you, update them on what you have been doing, and inform them of your intention to apply to graduate school. You might mention an intention of asking them for a letter of recommendation; their reply may give you a sense of how willing they might be to write a letter. You might also volunteer in a research lab at a nearby university in order to cultivate a new relationship with a potential letter writer. If it is difficult to envision three high-quality letters from professors, consider whether you might apply for a Master's program or dedicate some serious time to volunteering in various labs prior to applying.

Getting Ready for Interviews

- At this point, programs may have reached out to invite you for an interview/recruitment weekend. These weekends are an opportunity for you to show the program that you are indeed the motivated, well-spoken, beloved applicant that your personal statement and letters of recommendation described you as. During these weekends, you have the chance to meet the faculty, spend time with graduate students, explore the campus/city, and decide whether you could see yourself attending that program. However, this weekend is also a chance for the faculty and graduate students to meet you, and for everyone to decide whether they could see you attending their program.
- The primary rule of interview weekends is that the weekend begins before you even arrive. Every interaction (email, phone call, etc.) gives people more information about who you are and how you carry yourself. Some tips: dress well, come prepared with your CV, do your research beforehand (e.g., know your potential advisors research), and demonstrate your motivation and interest in their program. Most importantly, be yourself, but try to be the best version of that self.
- For many, the interview weekend can be intimidating, but it does not have to be. Remember that the program invited you to the interview for a reason, so be honest with them and yourself while you are enjoying the opportunity to meet new people.
- The structure of the interview weekend will vary by program. Some Social and Personality tracks will invite as few as 5 applicants, while others may invite 10 or 15 applicants (or more); there is no definitive number of applicants that are invited each year. These numbers will depend on how many faculty are recruiting that year, how much funding is available for the upcoming year, and how many "good" applicants there were.

Section 6: Miscellaneous Advice

Track Your Application Process

- To help you keep track of your application process, create an Excel document that lists the following:
 - a. Type of program
 - b. University name
 - c. Faculty member you'd be interested in working with (if applicable)
 - d. Application deadline
 - e. Columns with information on admissions requirements
 - f. A column to remind you whether or not you submitted GRE scores
 - g. A column for transcript submission
 - h. A column for personal statement requirements/submission

Need More Time Before Applying to Grad School?

- Consider delaying graduation or taking additional classes after graduation to develop your skills or knowledge and improve your GPA.
- Get involved in a lab for at least a few months, if not longer. There are many paid research opportunities (e.g., serving as a lab manager or research assistant). The longer you are with a lab, the more training and experiences you will accrue. Ask for opportunities to present posters, analyze data, and contribute to a manuscript for publication.
- Consider completing a Master's program in an effort to boost your GPA and get real hands-on experience with research and working directly with faculty members. Look for programs that are funded or start slowly by entering part-time.

Deciding Where to Accept

- For PhD and Master's programs in which you work closely with a faculty advisor (or advisors), the most important criteria is "fit." Fit can be difficult to judge, but it is possible to gather information related to fit by speaking with your potential advisors and their students. Fit has two major components.
 - a. First is your *interpersonal compatibility*. There should be a sense of mutual respect and communicative ease between student and advisor. Your advisor will see you through professional and sometimes personal difficulties. Most people are intimidated by their faculty advisors, especially at first, but you should not be afraid of them. Beyond these components, social match should not factor into your decision too heavily.
 - b. A second component of "fit" is your *research compatibility*. You and your advisors should make good collaborators. You should not only have the same or overlapping interests, but also that you have the same goals and that you work well together. Typically, early career faculty aim to publish a lot and later career faculty publish relatively less, but with more discernment. Consider how much your advisor is likely to publish, and what kinds of publications they want to produce and how these factors align with your career goals. In addition, advisors vary in the amount of guidance and oversight they tend to provide. You are most likely to succeed with an advisor whose training style matches how you prefer to learn (e.g., Do you like to follow detailed instructions, or do you like to work with greater independence?). In addition, you should have compatible beliefs about what constitutes "good" research, and how best to balance accuracy with readability. For research interests

and working styles, you need not have the same opinions as your advisor, but you should avoid advisors whose opinions conflict with yours.

- You should select a program where you feel supported, where you like the other students and faculty, and where graduating students go on to have careers that you want to have (e.g., good post-docs, tenure track jobs at colleges and universities, or jobs in private industry). Look closely at the program requirements and the number and type of courses that you will be required to take, and the number of TAs and other obligations that you will have. These factors will determine how much time you have to conduct your own research.
- Institutions vary greatly in the resources that they have. You should consider whether you can live comfortably on the stipend that you are provided, whether the school will give you access to research materials (e.g., journal articles, statistical software, research facilities), and whether there will be funding available for your research and additional expenses (e.g., summers, conference travel, undergraduate thesis students). Also, look for other opportunities for training that fit with your career or research goals, such as pedagogical training, advanced statistical training, or training in neuroscience.
- Other considerations that may influence where you decide to go are: location (e.g., whether it is a nice place to live, how close you will be to family), the amount of time that earning your degree will likely take, and whether you have been offered any merit-based fellowships or awards.

What if You Don't Get In?

- Although it can seem like it, being rejected is not the end of the world. Rejections can only derail you if you allow them to. There are multiple factors that may have led to your rejection letter(s), but take this moment to reevaluate your plans, your strengths and weaknesses, and consider alternative strategies.
 - a. **Reevaluate Your Plans:** Is going to graduate school the only way to achieve your career goals? If the answer to that question is “no”, exploring career paths that do not involve graduate school may be your next step. If the answer to that question is “yes”, now is the time to figure out your areas of *growth* (also known as areas of weakness).
 - b. **Strengths and Weaknesses:** You may be looking at your CV or personal statement wondering what went wrong, but fail to see possible shortcomings. Alternatively, you may see a long list of shortcomings with few strengths. Your best resource in navigating these two areas are professors in social and personality psychology (e.g., your letter writers, professors in your department). If you want to succeed in this field, professors in this field will be able to guide you in the right direction. Through this process (and potentially all of graduate school), you will receive constructive criticism that may be hard to hear, but this feedback will help you in the long run.
 - c. **Consider Alternative Strategies:** Now that you have figured out what your strengths and weaknesses are, what are your next steps? If your GRE scores need improvement, take a prep class to boost your scores. If you need more research experience, take the next year to work in a lab. If you did not have “good fit” with the professors you applied to, reevaluate and determine your research interests; you may need to expand or modify your program search after solidifying your research interests. If you may benefit from a Master's program first, see section 3 in this document for advice.

Some Additional Tips

- You can learn a great deal of important information by reaching out to the professors you want to work with and/or their graduate students. Not only does this put your name into their memory, but it also gives them the chance to share insider information. One of the most common mistakes is for people to apply to a professor only to find out that person is not accepting students or has decided to completely shift topics of interest. Faculty can also let you know if they are looking for specific skills or experience that year, which you can mention in your letters.
- You should also talk to faculty at your own undergraduate or Master's program. Academia is a much more interconnected world than most students realize, and your stats professor may just be conference buddies with that professor with whom you desperately want to work.
- For applicants with a disability, there are tools and resources at each institution you are applying to. During your program search, be sure to visit the disability services website at each respective institution. When preparing for the GRE, consider whether standard or non-standard administration will suit you best and arrange accordingly. As part of the application itself, you are not required to self-disclose a disability, but this decision is entirely up to you. If you choose to self-disclose a disability in your application materials, speak directly with your letter writers about this decision.
- Some unique opportunities for students from underrepresented ethnic groups:
 - a. SPSP offers the Summer Program for Undergraduate Research (SPUR), which is an intensive summer internship in the methods of social and personality psychology for undergraduates from underrepresented ethnic groups. This 8-week program comes with a \$3000 stipend to cover living expenses and \$500 to cover travel expenses.
 - b. Some psychology departments hold Diversity Recruitment Weekends, where ethnic minority undergraduate students are provided with information related to graduate school in psychology. These weekends include opportunities to meet graduate students and faculty members, as well as workshops to help prepare students for the application process.

Helpful Resources

- [APA's Guide to Applying to Graduate and Professional Programs](#)
- [APA's Guide for Graduate Students with Disabilities](#)
- [APA's Guide for LGBT Graduate Students](#)
- [APA's Guide for Ethnic Minority Graduate Students](#)
- [APA's Applying to Graduate School and Professional Programs: A Guidebook for Students of Color](#)
- [SPSP's SPUR Program](#)
- [Additional Resources on APA Website](#)
- GRE Resources
 - a. [Magoosh](#)
 - b. [ETS](#)
 - c. [Princeton Review](#)
 - d. [Kaplan](#)
- [Another Road Map \(created by Steve Lindsay\)](#)