

University of Pittsburgh
PSYCHOLOGY ADVISING OFFICE

Graduate School Timeline

Freshman-sophomore year

It is never too early to begin narrowing down your interests and starting to plan for the future. This is the time to explore areas of interest through coursework, volunteer experience, experiential learning opportunities, job shadowing, and interviewing professionals. You will want to focus on achieving and maintaining a strong GPA, building relationships with faculty and your advisor(s), adding to your resume, and identifying interest areas.

Junior year fall semester

This is the time to begin (if you haven't already) really establishing yourself in your major. Take advantage of as many applicable opportunities as you can: Directed Research, Supervised Field Placement, Undergraduate Teaching Assistant, Psi Chi, and Panther Psychology.

Identify possible faculty members for letters of recommendation. Possibilities could include professors, research supervisors, and/or faculty organization advisors. Some students have a hard time identifying three faculty members in psychology, and now is the time to try to foster these relationships. Try taking a professor for more than one class, take smaller sections of courses, get involved in a research lab, etc.

Junior year spring semester

In addition to continuing to build a strong resume filled with experience and a strong GPA, you should start thinking about the GRE exam(s). Students interested in applying to graduate school are more often than not required to take the GRE General Exam. In addition to the general exam, some students are also required to take the GRE Psychology Subject Exam. You should plan ahead for these exams so that you have time to gather resources, choose testing date(s), and STUDY!! Studying for these exams should not be taken lightly, and it is challenging to get into the mindset of standardized tests and master the content of the exam(s).

In addition to studying for the GRE exam(s), you should begin to search for possible graduate schools in your area of interest. The process of choosing possible programs can seem challenging, but if you are prepared and organized it will be worth the work. Unfortunately, there is no one resource that will answer all your questions or provide you with all the information you will need to make an informed decision. However, using a websites, books/publications, professors, and advisors you will become organized and knowledgeable about this process.

Websites:

Once you have narrowed down what types of programs you are looking for, there are a number of resources that are available.

- APA website: www.apa.org
- ACA website www.counseling.org
- Grad school listings: www.gradschools.com
- CACREP (Counsel for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs): www.cacrep.org
- Council on Social Work Education: <http://www.cswe.org/CSWE/>

Also, check out professional organizations in your area of interest. Helpful links are listed on the career handouts in the Advising Office.

Publications:

After choosing at least a dozen of possible schools, you will need to evaluate some important factors including: program size, faculty research, geographic location, financial assistance, teaching/research assistantships, fit of program to your needs and interests. As you are evaluating the programs, you should also research what the schools deem important in the application process. The Graduate Study in Psychology published annually by APA is available in the Advising Office and Hillman Library is a great resource, because it rates the following factors for each program on a low, medium, high rating scale: GRE scores, GPA, Research experience, Volunteer/service learning experience, work experience, extracurricular activities, interview, personal statement, and letters of recommendation. This book also includes helpful information about financial assistance, research/teaching assistantships, fellowships, and scholarships. The Advising Office also has various other publications to help with your graduate school search process.

Senior year fall semester

You should have either taken the GRE exam(s), or are planning to take the exam this semester. You should have your desired scores by mid-November of this term (assuming you want to begin graduate school directly after you finish your undergraduate degree). You want to make sure that you have scores you are satisfied with by this time because application deadlines will begin December 1st and continue on through February. Some schools won't accept late test scores, and you don't want all of your hard work to be wasted on poor planning.

Thank recommenders for their assistance and support. This is one step that some students overlook amidst the application process. Recommenders are helping you by writing these recommendations and the least you can do is to acknowledge their support.

It would be helpful for you to create a listing, or chart, of the schools you have applied to, application deadlines, anticipated acceptance dates, and other important facts (types of financial assistance, research/teaching assistantships, etc) that will factor into your final decision. This will help you to consider all factors when making decisions between schools.

Application deadlines begin December 1st, so you will be busy filling out applications, writing your personal statements, and obtaining letters of recommendation. Some students try to take a smaller course load this term in order to allot the extra time this application process demands.

Senior year spring semester

If you have planned properly, this semester will be making decisions and evaluating offers. Now is the time to review your organized list of possible graduate schools to prepare for acceptance letters. Evaluating your offers can be tough, so make sure to enlist help (family, faculty, research supervisors, and your recommenders).

File FAFSA form to apply for financial aid. This form is due by March 1st, and if you plan on attending grad school after you graduate from undergrad, you will need to have submitted this form.

Lastly, because applying to graduate programs is a process, make sure to use the resources available and enlist the help of advisors, professors, and other students to help you!

