Applying to Graduate School... looking at the “why” and “how”

Some Basic Facts and Recommendations

Dr. Gerald M. Long

No guaranteed formula for success... but *guidelines* for reasonably successful outcomes
Applying to Graduate School

Some Basic Facts Regarding...WHY?

The Changing Educational Climate... 

- Annual UCLA Survey of over 275,000 freshmen at 450 colleges and universities nationwide:
  - over 75% of freshmen expect to earn a degree beyond the bachelor's degree
- Approximately 85% of incoming Villanova freshmen report that they expect to continue their education beyond the B.A. or B.S. degree.
- Approximately 95% of graduating Villanova seniors report that they expect to extend their education beyond the B.A./B.S. degree (e.g., grad school, medical school, dental school, law school, business school, physical therapy programs, etc).
Bachelor’s degree => => Master’s degree:

“. . . the bachelor’s degree will continue to be necessary, but it will no longer be sufficient for most individuals.”

- The Master’s degree is becoming the “expected” degree for most professions (just as the bachelor’s degree did after WWII).

- In many professions, the Master’s degree is already identified as the entry-level degree in those professions (e.g., public administration, business, engineering, social work, psychology, human resources, education, theater, market research, etc, etc).
Why Graduate School?

... a growing choice for many

Number Of Master’s Degrees Awarded

- 2 – 3% Increase
- 4 – 5% Increase
- 7 – 8% Forecast

Years

Why Graduate School?
Financial Considerations

Average Annual Earnings of Workers 25-64 Years Old
(U.S. Census Bureau)

Level of Educational Attainment

Not HS Grad  Some College  BA/BS Degree  MA/MS Degree  Professional Degree

0 20000 40000 60000 80000 100000 120000

Not HS Grad
HS Grad
AA Degree
BA/BS Degree
MA/MS Degree
Professional Degree

Why Graduate School?
Financial Considerations

Average Annual Earnings of Workers 25-64 Years Old
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0 20000 40000 60000 80000 100000 120000
Why Graduate School?
Financial Considerations (continued)

Synthetic Work-life Estimate Of Earnings (in millions) U.S. Census Bureau

Estimate of total lifetime earnings

Level of Educational Attainment

Not HS Grad
Some College
BA/BS Degree
Doctoral Degree

Professional Degree

HS Grad
AA Degree
MA/MS Degree

Professional Degree
### Why Graduate School?

#### Additional Financial Facts (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>% Unemployed in 2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No High Sch</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA/BS</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>1%</td>
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</table>

The graph shows the % unemployed for different levels of education in 2007, with higher education levels associated with lower unemployment rates.
Conclusion:

For a host of reasons, the role of graduate education has become increasingly prominent over the past 15 – 20 years as evidenced by:

1. changing student expectations about post-baccalaureate education
2. changing employer and professional expectations within disciplines and fields
Conclusions (continued)

3. increasing (potentially exploding) enrollment figures in graduate schools nationwide
4. positive financial consequences from earning advanced degrees
5. lower unemployment rates with advanced degrees
Remember the Nancy Dudak Plan:

- Try to select a career path following the “Career Development Process” of:
  
  - Explore  =>  Decide  =>  Act

- For many students, post-bachelor’s education (of some type) will sooner or later be the decision you reach in step #2. Then what??
Applying to Graduate School

What are “they” looking for??

What are Selection Committees focusing on?

Five Areas!

1. **Solid Undergraduate Training**

   . . . which refers to a student’s exposure to rigorous foundational courses in the psychology major -- regardless of the subfield in psychology in which you are seeking graduate training

What does this mean for you?
Applying to Graduate School

What are “they” looking for??

Which courses are really expected by Graduate Selection Committees?

Directors at over 160 clinical psychology Ph.D. programs that were accredited by APA were surveyed,

. . . asked to list those courses that were either “required” or “recommended” for incoming students to have on their transcripts
Applying to Graduate School

What are “they” looking for??

Listed from highest to lowest, those rated as either “required” or “recommended:”

- Statistics 94%
- Research methods 68%
- Abnormal/psychopathology 51%
- Physiological 33%
- Cognition 30%
- Personality 28%
Applying to Graduate School

Concerning Villanova’s Psychology Curriculum:

- Understand why your psychology curriculum has been designed as it is
  - Strong emphasis on foundational courses
  - Only modest need for specialization within subfields

- Be confident in the educational training you have received -- and emphasize it in your application
Applying to Graduate School

What are “they” looking for??

2. Good Grades

Norcross et al (2005) found that an applicant’s GPA was rated as one of the top 3 determiner’s of a successful application.

– true for both master’s and doctoral programs.

(What does that mean?)
Applying to Graduate School
What are “they” looking for??

Norcross et al survey (2005) of doctoral programs in all Psychology fields:

- Mean Overall Minimum GPA “Required” 3.11
- Mean “Actual” Overall GPA 3.54
- Mean Psychology GPA “Required” 3.17
- Mean “Actual” Psychology GPA 3.66
Applying to Graduate School

What are “they” looking for??

Norcross et al 2005 survey of Master’s programs in all Psychology fields:

- Mean Overall Minimum GPA “Required” 2.92
- Mean “Actual” Overall GPA 3.37
- Mean Psychology GPA “Required” 3.05
- Mean “Actual” Psychology GPA 3.48
Applying to Graduate School

What are “they” looking for??

3. **Good GRE Scores** *(What does that mean?)*

**Ph.D. Level Programs (Mayne et al study of *clinical* programs)**

*Preferred Minimum*

- Quantitative GRE: ~580
- Verbal GRE: ~580
- Analytic GRE: ~580 (old data)
- Psychology Subtest: ~590
Applying to Graduate School
What are “they” looking for??

- GRE Scores in *Ph.D. Programs*
  (Norcross et al 2005 study of *all* psychology fields):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Minimum Required</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative GRE:</td>
<td>~538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal GRE:</td>
<td>~529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytic GRE:</td>
<td>~547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology Subtest:</td>
<td>~552</td>
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Applying to Graduate School
What are “they” looking for??

**GRE Scores in Master’s Programs**
(Norcross et al. 2005 study of all psychology fields):

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative GRE:</td>
<td>~453</td>
<td>~549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal GRE:</td>
<td>~449</td>
<td>~504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytic GRE:</td>
<td>~456</td>
<td>~552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology Subtest:</td>
<td>~495</td>
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Applying to Graduate School
What are “they” looking for??

Summary by Norcross et al regarding GREs and Grade Expectations by Psychology Graduate Schools:

Verbal + Quant GRE = 1050 for Master’s
Verbal + Quant GRE = 1180 for Ph.D.

Actual Cumulative GPA = 3.3 for Master’s
Actual Cumulative GPA = 3.6 for Ph.D.
Applying to Graduate School

What are “they” looking for??

Two important caveats about these data (both GPA data and the GRE data)!!!

Keep in mind the fact that:

1. These data are *averages*.

   . . . incredible variability out there both from one school to another and from one psych field to another (even at same institution)

   e.g., Yale/Penn vs. Kansas vs. SUNY, Buffalo
   e.g., Penn State Clinical vs. Penn State Social or Industrial or Developmental or Educational...
Applying to Graduate School

What are “they” looking for??

2. These data about Grades and GPAs apply to *Psychology* graduate programs.

   In closely related fields the levels can be much lower:
   - human resources,
   - criminal justice,
   - school counseling,
   - family counseling
   - substance abuse treatment
   - etc, etc
Applying to Graduate School

What are “they” looking for??

4. Good Letters of Recommendation

From primarily faculty who know you and can add to what your transcript already says . . .

– your commitment to the field
– your potential for success in grad school & beyond
– your interpersonal “style” (e.g., leadership, maturity, perseverance, ease to work with, etc)
– other “stuff” that gives a clearer picture of you (e.g., internship experience, research experience, Psychology Club, Psi Chi, etc)
Applying to Graduate School
What are “they” looking for??

Good Letters of Recommendation (continued)

Advice for Requesting Letters:

– Give your writers 3-4 weeks before application deadline

– Give your writers important information about you:
  – Resume’
  – List of psychology courses taken with grades received
  – GRE Scores
  – Other relevant information (career plans, internship experience, research experience, employment history)

– Give your writers stamped, addressed envelopes for mailing letters to the intended programs
5. Good Personal Statement (Letter of Intent)

- What are your interests in Psychology and how did you come to those interests?
- Why are you seeking a career in that field?
- What are your ultimate career plans?
- How will their graduate program assist with your plans?

- Have you done your homework about their program (e.g., type of program, orientation of program, faculty strengths, etc)?
Applying to Graduate School: What are they looking for?

Following advice by Appleby and Appleby (2006), avoid the dreaded "kisses of death" in your application:

- Inappropriate letter writer (e.g., family friend, therapist, boy/girlfriend, parish priest, . . .)
- Inappropriate self disclosure (e.g., mental health problems, dysfunctional family background)
- Naïve statements (e.g., “I want to help people” or too cutesy)
- Poor writing skills (e.g., spelling & grammatical errors, poorly organized)
Applying to Graduate School
Summary of Advice

Final Recommendations from Jalbert (1996):
Remember the “3 B’s Formula” . . .

1. **Be reasonable** in your goals.
   - Honestly assess your strengths & weaknesses.
   - Apply to several “appropriate” programs: 6 – 12.
   - Don’t put unnecessary restrictions on your choices (e.g., geographical limitations)
Applying to Graduate School

Summary of Advice

2. **Be responsible** in how you present yourself.
   - Appear professional at all times
   - Choose appropriate letter writers
   - Write a well-crafted Personal Statement
     (i.e., you => => well adjusted, personable, intellectually curious, eager to work with faculty, devoid of personal problems, etc)

3. **Be resourceful** in considering your path. (Are there reasonable alternatives for you?)
   (e.g., Master’s vs. Ph.D.) (e.g., School psych vs. Clinical psych)
Applying to Graduate School

END