

## A Sample Schedule for Graduate School Admission

You should think about graduate school early on in your college career. The earlier you make up your mind, the better off you will be as you approach the application process. There are things that you can begin doing as early as your sophomore year to ensure that you gain entrance to the graduate program of your choice. The following article by Schumacher (1994) provides a timetable of things to do while in college to ensure graduate school acceptance or employment. Post a copy of this article in an obvious place and write the date of completion beside activities as you complete them.

### Your Sophomore Year

1. Talk with your teachers who conduct research and/or clinical activities of interest to you and discuss the possibility of becoming involved in these activities with them.
2. Attend psychology-related seminars at your school and surrounding institutions and document your attendance. Join the Psi Chi chapter or psychology club on your campus.
3. Find out what psychology conferences are held in your region that students can attend. Check the *American Psychologist* (found in your school library or in a psychology faculty member's office) or *Eye on Psi Chi* (the Psi Chi journal) for the locations and dates (usually in the spring), and attend as many as possible.
4. Talk to graduate students on your campus and on other campuses (preferably students in the field of psychology) or to those at the meetings in item #3 about graduate school life, finances, and workloads. In addition, ask them about psychology-related seminars or meetings they might be aware of (see items #2 and #3 above).
5. Order the APA publication *Preparing for Graduate Study in Psychology: Not for Seniors Only!* Locate a copy of *Getting In: A Step-by-Step Plan for Gaining Admission to Graduate School in Psychology*. Read them!
6. Maintain a grade of "B" or better in all your psychology classes. This will greatly enhance your chances of graduate school acceptance or employment in the field of psychology. While maintaining this level of performance, do not lose sight of the goal of obtaining knowledge through your classes, research, volunteer activities, contacts with faculty, and meetings you attend.

### Your Junior Year

1. Become involved in a research project as part of a class requirement, do an independent study project, or work with a faculty member on his/her research.
2. Write a resume as described in the APA publication *Preparing for Graduate Study in Psychology: Not for Seniors Only!* Follow the suggested guidelines, even if the resume is to be submitted to potential employers and not to graduate schools. Emphasize psychology-related extracurricular activities (e.g., meetings and volunteer work). If you are a minority student, emphasize your ethnic identification; it will be to your advantage because of the shortage of minority psychologists and because there are additional sources of financial assistance for minority students.
3. Obtain experience through volunteer work if you are interested in clinical or counseling psychology. If possible, do some research in connection with your volunteer activities.

4. Submit your research to a student conference and continue item #4 from sophomore year.
5. Investigate summer jobs or educational/research opportunities related to psychology. Many summer internships are available through laboratories or professional organizations. If you are a minority student, investigate the minority summer programs, such as those at the University of South Carolina and the University of Georgia, or the minority summer research experience offered by Bell Laboratories. Check with your department faculty on a regular basis concerning available opportunities, and **apply early**.
6. Prepare, register for and, in the spring, take the aptitude test of the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) and the Miller Analogies Test (MAT), even if you have not yet decided to apply for graduate school. (*Author's update*: Fewer and fewer graduate schools are requiring the MAT and more and more are requiring the GRE Subject Test.)
7. Check with the campus placement office for dates of on-campus visits by recruiters and with your department chair for dates of visits by graduate school representatives. Determine the types of opportunities available and list the ones of greatest interest to you for future contact.

### **The Summer Before Your Senior Year**

1. Obtain summer employment, experience, or education related to psychology. If you are seriously considering graduate school, retake in summer school any classes in which you received a grade below a "B." Of special importance are Statistics and Research Methods.
2. Decide if you are going to graduate school (and, if so, in what field) or if you plan to work immediately following graduation. However, do not do anything that would prevent you from changing your decision later or from pursuing the other option if existing plans fail. The books mentioned in item #3 below should aid you in your decision.
3. Consult the APA publication *Graduate Studies in Psychology* for requirements and information on graduate programs in psychology. List schools of interest to you, and request from them bulletins, brochures, financial aid forms, and department application forms. For job ideas, descriptions, skills needed, and interview techniques, consult the following APA publications: *The Psychology Major: Training and Employment Strategies*, *Getting In: A Step-by-Step Plan for Gaining Admission to Graduate School in Psychology*, *Career Opportunities for Psychologists*. List job areas to pursue and investigate sources of additional training you will need.
4. Prepare for the advanced GRE test in psychology by studying the commercially available books and software, and by re-reading your general psychology textbook, including the sections on statistics and methodology. Register for the early fall offerings of the aptitude and the advanced tests. Repeated testing should improve your scores. Also, register for the Miller Analogies Test (MAT) and study the types of items it contains.
5. Revise and update your resume to include new experiences. Remember neatness and organization create a good first impression.
6. Save money for graduate school application fees, resumes, and transcript costs.

### **The Fall Semester of Your Senior Year**

1. Be sure you take (and pass) all classes needed to graduate. Obtain a statement of standing from your

registrar to verify this. You do not want any surprises next semester when you apply for graduation!

2. Discuss with your advisor and other psychology faculty members the graduate programs or jobs of interest to you. Show them your resume so they may better counsel you and determine if your expectations are realistic, and obtain a list of additional suggestions from them. Discuss the performance of other students from your department in the graduate programs or business settings of potential interest to you. Also discuss the socioeconomic conditions that might affect you at the schools, industries, clinics, or hospitals in which you are interested, and in the regions or cities in which they are located.
3. If possible, visit the schools, industries, or agencies of your greatest interest, and establish personal contact with key people at each. Obtain impressions of the institution or organization from others having similar backgrounds and qualifications. Even if there are no existing vacancies, the expression of interest and establishment of personal contact will give you an added advantage should a vacancy occur.
4. Prepare for and take the aptitude and advanced tests of the GRE in October if possible, and no later than December. Also take the MAT.
5. Register to take the advanced test again in December, or January at the latest. Note the possibility that the January test date may be too late for your scores to be considered for fellowships at some institutions.
6. Obtain information on available fellowships, scholarships, assistantships, and loans not associated with the institutions to which you plan to apply. Obtain this information from your financial aid office.
7. Request a student copy of your transcript from every institution you have attended and check for errors. This process may take longer than you think (especially if there are errors), so allow ample time.
8. Duplicate your resume and transcripts for distribution. If you plan to apply to graduate school, remember there are application fees (which may be waived, so ask) and charges for mailing official transcripts (which should follow as soon as the fall semester's grades are included). Even resume duplications and mailing can be expensive for a student budget.
9. Check the latest copy of *Graduate Study in Psychology* to obtain requirements and deadlines for various graduate school applications and fellowships. Check the campus placement office for dates of visiting recruiters who will conduct job interviews on campus. Follow through on these early.
10. Write to the personnel office of the states in which you wish to apply for jobs, and request descriptions of positions related to psychology. If you need to take the civil service or other exams to qualify for these positions, register for the required exams. Put your name on mailing lists for job announcements.
11. Narrow down your list of schools to approximately ten, including at least two where you are confident you will be accepted. If you are job-oriented or are uncertain you will be accepted into any graduate program, list in order of preference the types of jobs and, if possible, the specific agencies with whom you would consider accepting employment. Remember, both job and admission competition are keen, and you may not be able to obtain your first or second choice. Be prepared to be flexible. Post any deadlines for application where you will constantly see them.

12. Determine from whom you wish to obtain letters of recommendation, and notify these people at least three weeks before the deadline for your application. Supply them with necessary forms, addresses, information about your qualifications and due dates, along with jobs or programs for which you are applying. Include a stamped addressed (neatly typed, *not* written by hand) envelope to each school or agency they must write. Follow up one week before each deadline with a thank-you note (i.e., a “friendly” reminder to ensure that your information has been sent).
13. Request that your GRE and MAT scores be sent to all schools or employers requiring them. If your scores are high and will be considered an asset, have them sent to all places you are applying. Request that transcripts be mailed to all schools and agencies.
14. Check before Christmas to be certain all materials, especially recommendations, have been sent. Most incomplete applications result from missing letters of recommendation. Be persistent.
15. Include in your application package to graduate schools or employers all requested materials, a resume, copies of transcripts and test scores, and names of those sending recommendations. Indicate what additional material is to follow (transcripts with your fall grades, revised test scores, etc.). **Follow application instructions exactly.** For job seekers, contact local community service agencies, hospitals, research institutes, public relations firms, test or survey developers, and market research departments. Send them letters of inquiry for position vacancies and a summary of your credentials. Make these contacts as personal as possible. Keep a record of all contacts made and all materials sent to each employer or school.

### **Spring Semester of Your Senior Year**

1. Verify in January that all your application materials were received at every place you applied.
2. Send additional GRE results (if higher) and fall semester grade report to update your applications.
3. Expect first choice offers to be made by graduate schools before April 1; however, vacancies may occur any time prior to the fall semester, due to changes in plans of those already accepted. If you have not been accepted anywhere by April 15, you should do the following.
4. Call everywhere you applied, asking them to keep your application active through the summer, as you are still interested, even in a last-minute acceptance.
5. Call admissions offices of schools whose requirements you easily meet, but to which you did not apply, to see if they are still considering applicants. If so, apply.
6. Check *Graduate Study in Psychology* for schools with late or no deadlines and apply.
7. If you are rejected by doctoral programs, apply to master’s programs with late or open admission dates.
8. Job hunt, using the guidelines given above. You may need to postpone graduate school for a year and then reapply. A good job related to psychology will enhance your credentials.
9. Contact psychology faculty you have met from other institutions, and request their advice (i.e., keep your network lines open).

10. Follow up with a phone call or letter on job applications submitted, and continue to make as many contacts with agencies and industries as possible. Often “word-of-mouth” among personnel managers results in unexpected employment.
11. Keep your most important psychology textbooks. They will come in handy later, whether in graduate school or on the job.

If you were not accepted into a graduate school, even after checking all institutions for last-minute openings and applying to several master’s degree programs, do not give up! Seek employment, preferably related to psychology, and try to be admitted as a special graduate student at the nearest institution offering graduate classes in psychology. Enroll in one or two classes per semester that do not conflict with your work schedule and **commit yourself to making an “A”** in these classes. The more experimentally oriented the class, the better (an “A” in graduate statistics will be quite valuable in convincing evaluation committees to ignore a “C” in undergraduate statistics). When you apply to graduate school again next year, these efforts will assist in persuading the review committee that you are persistent, capable of performing at the graduate level, and motivated to continue to study in psychology. These graduate credits may be transferred later toward a degree. You may even seek at midterm to be admitted to the graduate program in psychology where you are taking the graduate work (although you may still wish to transfer to another program later). But, to reap these benefits, **you must perform well in any graduate classes you attempt!** If you cannot take graduate classes, repeat any relevant undergraduate classes in which you received a grade lower than “B.” Mention in future applications your revised GPA, as it will not be reflected on your original undergraduate transcript. You should then update your resume, correcting weaknesses if possible. Review those places to which you applied the previous spring, realistically determining why you were rejected, and re-apply to those for which you feel you are qualified. You may have been rejected because the particular applicants against whom you were compared were all exceptional; the next year this may not happen. Also apply to a few new places. Follow the senior year timetable again, and consider retaking the GRE and MAT if your scores were low. Save what money you can while working so the availability of financial aid will not dictate if you are able to attend graduate school.

#### Reference

Schumacher, S. J. (1994, Fall). A suggested plan of action for graduate school admission. *Psi Chi Newsletter*, 20, 11–13.