



“Psychology Works” Fact Sheet: Applying To Canadian Graduate Schools

When do you start looking?

It is a good idea to start researching potential graduate schools/programs a few years before you intend to apply. Although this may seem early, it will help you ensure that you have the necessary course requirements and research/work/volunteer experience to be a strong candidate. Application deadlines for graduate schools range from the beginning of December to the beginning of March. Be sure to give yourself enough time to complete the application packages by starting in the summer or fall of the last year of your undergraduate degree.

How do you choose a program?

One of the first decisions you will need to make is whether you want to pursue a graduate program that focuses on practice, research, or both. This decision will depend on your career goals. Different graduate programs will focus to a different degree or practice versus research. For example, some subfields of psychology, such as cognitive and social, may have a greater emphasis on research and becoming a scientist and/or a professor. Alternatively, other psychology graduate programs have both an applied and research emphasis, including, but not limited to, those programs in clinical, counselling, school, neuropsychology, forensic, and industrial/organizational psychology. Look on program websites and ask faculty/current/former students about the types of jobs students typically have upon graduation from the program, to help you make an informed decision. Also keep in mind that some universities offer unique programs specializing in methods, community psychology, history of psychology, etc.

Which universities have graduate programs in psychology?

The CPA website has a list of Canadian universities that offer degrees in psychology (<http://www.cpa.ca/students/resources/canadianuniversities/>) and <http://www.cpa.ca/students/resources/Experimental>.

Note that not all universities or graduate programs are accredited, which could affect internship opportunities and future job prospects. Contact universities to determine their accreditation status.

If you are leaning towards a professional psychology degree in clinical, counselling, school, or neuropsychology, you should visit the CPA’s accreditation webpages to see which universities offer training that meets professional standards (<http://www.cpa.ca/accreditation/CPAAccreditedprograms/>). The Council of University Directors of Clinical Psychology website contains an information sheet (http://cudcp.wildapricot.org/Resources/Documents/CUDCP_2011_Graduate_School_Fact_Sheet.pdf) specifically on applying to graduate school in clinical psychology.



What makes you a strong applicant?

University admission requirements vary. By starting your search in the 1st or 2nd year of your undergraduate degree, you can shape your experiences to be certain you have the necessary pre-requisites for the graduate programs to which you intend to apply. Looking at the admission requirements will help you determine whether your degree, undergraduate coursework, and scores on standardized tests (if applicable) meet their standards. Statistics are usually available online to let you know how competitive the admission process is and the likelihood that you will be considered a strong applicant.

Most graduate psychology programs require applicants to have strong marks (typically above 80%), particularly in their psychology courses and often in research methods or statistics. Another common requirement is to have completed an undergraduate honour's thesis and to have additional research experience (volunteer or work). Some universities also require the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) or other standardized tests (e.g., the Test of English as a Foreign Language [TOEFL] for Francophone students applying to Anglophone universities). Taking these tests takes preparation, and you must plan ahead in case you need to re-take the test and to ensure that the results are available before graduate school application deadlines. Finally, many graduate programs require reference letters. Be sure to ask people who know you and your experiences well (e.g., research advisor, professor who taught you an upper year course), as reference letters are very important in the decision process.

How long is graduate school?

Some graduate programs end with a Master's degree (Master of Arts - M.A.; Master of Science - M.Sc.; or Master of Education – M.Ed.), while others continue on to a Doctoral degree (Doctor of Philosophy – Ph.D.; Doctor of Psychology – Psy.D.; or Doctor of Education – Ed.D.). At a minimum, a Master's takes 1-2 years, whereas a Doctorate takes an additional 3-5 years to complete. Combined Master's and Ph.D. programs also exist at some universities. Career aspirations, finances, family situation, and time commitment will influence the type of program you pursue and the length of time it takes.

What are the program requirements?

Graduate programs differ in the type of courses they offer, how many they require you to take, and how much time they expect you to dedicate to them. Opportunities provided for research, practicum placements, teaching, and mandatory internships also differ across graduate schools. Check the requirements for potential programs on their websites to ensure they match your career plans.

How do you pick an academic advisor?

The most significant relationship you will develop during your graduate studies is the one between you and your faculty supervisor. Finding and connecting with a professor that has similar research interests as you not only increases your chances of being accepted to that university, it also ensures that the time you



spend in graduate school will be worthwhile and satisfying. University departmental webpages tend to provide lists of their faculty members, along with their bios, research interests, and contact information, including how to get in touch with their current graduate students. Researching and contacting possible faculty advisors to ask whether they are accepting graduate students in the upcoming year is a vital part of picking the right graduate school.

Some universities place most of the acceptance decision on the faculty member’s willingness to take on the student. Start early to make contact with possible supervisors at universities you think you might want to attend. From your first contact (likely by email), make sure you familiarize yourself with their work and come up with potential avenues of research that you would be interested in investigating. Remember, you are starting an important relationship; be polite and patient in waiting for a response.

How do you pay for graduate school?

Post-secondary education can be expensive, with tuition fees varying considerably depending on the graduate school. Graduate schools will usually report approximately how much you should expect to pay in tuition and additional fees per semester on their websites, as well as whether any internal scholarships, teaching assistantships, and research assistantships are possible. Applying to private, provincial and federal scholarships/grants can also help pay for your studies and cost of living as a graduate student. View the OGS (<https://osap.gov.on.ca/OSAPPortal/en/A-ZListofAid/PRD19842319.html>), SSHRC (<http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/>), NSERC (<http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/>) and CIHR (<http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/>) websites as a starting point for more information on provincial and federal scholarships. For up-to-date information about Master’s level funding, visit http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/Students-Etudiants/CGSHarmonization-HarmonizationBESC_eng.asp. If you want funding for your first year of graduate school, you need to submit the application the year before you intend to start (the year you are applying). Applications are typically due early in the fall semester (October/November).

A final note

When choosing the number of schools to which to apply, find a balance between quantity and quality in order to increase your chances of being accepted. Also be sure to get the advice of current graduate students. Good luck!

Where can you find more information?

- Visit the Student Section of CPA’s website (www.cpa.ca/students), especially its Resource page, which contains a presentation from the 2013 CPA Convention on applying to graduate school and some references (<http://www.cpa.ca/students/resources/>).
- View the CCPPP website (<http://www.cpppp.ca/index.php/en>) for information on applying to graduate and internship programs.
- APA’s website: (<http://www.apa.org/education/grad/index.aspx>)



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Your opinion matters! Please contact us with any questions or comments about any of the *Psychology Works* Fact Sheets: factsheets@cpa.ca

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