

A Suggested Plan of Action for Graduate School Admission

The following list by Susan Schumacher (published in the Fall, 1994 issue of the *Psi Chi Newsletter*) provides a timetable of things to do while in college to ensure employment or graduate school acceptance. Post a copy of this article in an obvious place and write the date of completion beside activities as you finish them.

SOPHOMORE YEAR

Date

- _____ 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 the *Psi Chi Newsletter* 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 work loads. In addition, ask them about psychology-related seminars or meetings they might be aware of (see items #2 and #3 above).
- _____ 5. Obtain the APA publication *Getting In: A Step-by-Step Plan for Gaining Admission to Graduate School in Psychology* and/or *The Complete Guide to Graduate School Admission* (both available as optional texts for Psych. 19. Read them!
- _____ 6. Maintain a grade of "B" or better in all psychology courses. 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 courses, research, volunteer activities, contacts with faculty, and meetings you attend.

JUNIOR YEAR

- _____ 1. Become involved in a research project as part of a course requirement, do an independent study project, or work with a faculty member on his or her research.
- _____ 2. Write a resume. Emphasize psychology-related extracurricular activities (e.g., meetings and volunteer work).

_____ 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. Check with your department faculty and the Career Services Center on a regular basis concerning available opportunities, and **apply early**.

_____ 6. Prepare and register for and, in the spring, take the general test of the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), even if you have not yet decided to apply for graduate school. You may alternatively take this test in the summer or fall.

_____ 7. Check with the Career Services Center for dates of on-campus visits by graduate school representatives. Determine the types of opportunities available and list the ones of greatest interest to you for future contact.

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 courses 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 Study 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 general and the subject tests.

_____ 5. Revise and update your resume to include new experiences. Remember that neatness

and organization create a good first impression.

_____ 6. Save money for graduate school application fees, resumes, and transcript costs.

FALL SEMESTER OF YOUR SENIOR YEAR

_____ 1. Be sure you take (and pass) all courses needed to graduate. Check with the Psychology Department and the Advising Center to make sure you are on track. You don't want any surprises next semester when you apply for graduation!

_____ 2. Discuss with your adviser 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, actually visit the schools, industries, or agencies of 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 general and subject tests of the GRE no later than October.

_____ 5. 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.

_____ 6. 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.

_____ 7. 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.

_____ 8. Narrow down your list of schools to approximately ten to fifteen, 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 competitions are keen, and you may not be able to obtain your first or second choice. Be prepared to be flexible. Post any deadlines for applications where you will constantly see them.

_____ 9. Determine from whom you wish to obtain letters of recommendation, and notify these people at least four 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 hand-written) envelope to each school or agency they must write. Follow up one week before each deadline with a thank-you note (a "friendly" reminder to ensure that your information has been sent).

_____ 10. Request that your GRE scores be sent to all schools requiring them. Request that transcripts be mailed to all schools.

_____ 11. Check before Christmas to be certain all materials, especially recommendations, have been sent. Most incomplete applications result from missing letters of recommendation. Be persistent.

_____ 12. Include in your application package to graduate schools all requested materials, a resume, copies of transcripts and test scores, and names of those sending recommendations. Indicate what additional material is to follow (official transcripts with your fall grades, official test scores, etc.). **Follow application instructions exactly.**

SPRING SEMESTER OF YOUR SENIOR YEAR

_____ 1. Verify in January that all your application materials were received at every place you applied.

_____ 2. Send 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:

_____ a. 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.

_____ b. 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.

_____ c. Check *Graduate Study in Psychology* for schools with late or no deadlines and apply.

_____ d. If you are rejected by doctoral programs, apply to master's programs with late or open admission dates.

_____ e. Job hunt. You may need to postpone graduate school for a year and reapply. A good job related to psychology will enhance your credentials.

_____ f. Contact psychology faculty whom you have met from other institutions, and request their advice (i.e., keep your network lines open).

_____ 4. Keep your most important psychology textbooks. They will come in handy later, whether in graduate school or on the job.