**Psi Chi Grad Panel**

**Introductions**

**Emily Broksch:** I’m a third-year in the Industrial and Organizational Psychology Ph.D. program here.  My research interests in helping, advisor is Dr. Ehrhart.

**Angie Leary:**  I’m a 1st year Clinical Psychology Ph.D. student.  I work in the Reale-time lab with Dr. Dvorak on projects related to alcohol interventions for students.

**Billy Volante:** I’m a 5th year Human Factors Psychology Ph.D. student.  Works in Dr. Hancock’s lab, lot of work in human-robot interaction, driving research

**Dawn Sarno:** I’m also a 5th-year Human Factors Ph.D. student and I have two main lines of research.  I have my cybersecurity line of research, which is concerned with and applied visual cognition line of research, how people search through 3d displays, improving working memory and executive function.

**Question from Jackie:** What are the pro’s and cons of being in your program?

**Dawn Sarno:** Human Factors is an interesting program based ini cognitive psychology, but very applied.  How can we use psychology to inform the design of products? Big reamlm is in cockpit design for agencies like the Air Force.  Pro of our prgorgam is that is diresctly applicable to industry. APle, google, government all seeking Human Factors, but people can go into academia too.

**Billy Volante:** It’s so diverse that it is a consequence, as there are so many things one could hone in on working.

**Angie Leary:** CLinical is also a very diverse degreee, because you can work in a clinic or PhdD program.  Usually have to learn clincical practice and research.

**Emily:** What is unique about I/O is that it is the study of people at work.  Everybody works, unfortunately! Most companies are looking for I/O because we make companies better.  You can go into practice or academia, but you’ll need to know research to apply it to the workplace. We do researche for the applied people, and then they use our research.  Both a pro in con!

**Billy Volante:** Often separate into practice and academia because industry and universities exist.  Luckily, our programs train us for everything so we can go either way when we graduate.  For you guys, when looking into the process for finding a school, a school might be more industry or academia-focused.

**Dawn Sarno:** A good point is that you might be really sure, but when you actually do it for real you might realize it’s not what you want.  You might not want to close doors to either academia or industry.

**Billy Volante:** If you know your major going into undergrad, you might switch later!  Undergrad is a lot like grad school in this respect.

**Emily Broksch:** When looking at programs, utilize their program website and handbooks!  Think of what you want yout of your graduate program. If you’re not totally sure, ask where their graduates end up going - either industry or academia.  Reach out to programs, that information is very helpful!

**Question from Sam:** For a prospective applicant like me, do you think that it would be best to approach the process with a more specific area or openness to different directions.  Such as writing in your personal statement. Tunnel vision versus being too broad!

**Dawn Sarno:** Everybody has tons ofopinions!  Don’t go in saying you like “psychology,” but graduate schools have no idea.  It’s okay to say you’re interested in something, but change your mind later. A personal statement isn’t a contract.  Show your ideas! When we look for research assistants, we look for strong thinkers!

**Angie Leary:** For a lot of Phd programs , you apply for a specifici lab and person.  If I’m applying to an alcoholism research lab, I wouldn’t say I’m looking to research mood disorders!

**Emily Brosch:** For the I/O Phd program, you figure out your advisor your first year instread of applying to someone.  Look into how they determine the advising style!

Dawn: From first-hand advisement from my advisor, even if you put in an application with different directions, they may still look at your application.  Depends on monetary factors too.

**Question from Student:** How long did you guys study for the GRE?

**Emily Broksch:** I studied religiously for 2-3 months.  Started sudying the summer of senior year, but had a very immature mentality and took the GRE later than most.  Stuied with flash cards and magoosh.

**Angie Leary:** I also studied during Summer, and I studied for 4 hours a day.  However I regret that, as my score didn’t improve much. Some faculty members would argue with that, but the GRE is just a tiny sliver of the pie.  I’m here in the clinical Phd program and my score was low average. I regret spending more time than I needed to on it. Don’t overwhelm yourself!

**Billy Volante:** I’m sort of outside the norm, but what I was told that your GRE score is just your entrance ticket to getting looked at.  As soon as you make that score, you’re considered in the application process. As long as you’re above that, you’re good! Getting better at it will benefit you more.  I studied a lot for about 2 weeks right before I took it. Biggest tips: 1 - do as many full practice tests as you can. Do you do the writing portions at the beginning?  Those two writing portions are 30 minute each and they tire you out. Practicing this way puts you in a more accurate mental state of what you’ll be in during test day. I did fairly well on the verbal portion of the GRE, and I just learned 100 vocabulary words and prefixes and suffixes to words.  Half the time, I was guessing but the roots and prefixes alloowed me to do well.

**Dawn Sarno:** Taking a full exam is like training for a marathon - you do the marathon each time!  Don’t study things you don’t need to study! Don’t waste your time on something if you know it!  Taking practice exams will show you the sections you need to improve on, and then don’t waste your time on the ones youo did well on!  Do practice exams! ETS puts out 4 free practice tests and use them to your advantage.

Billy: Don’t take GRE classes!  It’s expensive and the money isn’t worth what you get out of it.

**Question from Jackie:** Did you all pass the first time?

**Angie Leary:** No!  I took iti twice.

**Dawn Sarno:** A bare cutoff is the 50th percentile, so applying when you’re below that is a risk.  It means you’re “below average,” and for competitive programs you might need to be 80th percentile and above!  The only thing that GRE scores statistically predict is your first year GPA in grad school. Most advisors don’t care, but they will use it as a cutoff.  However, for fellowships GRE scores are amazing, and you can be fully funded if you score well on the GRE.

**Question from Student:**  How soon after your undergrad career did you take it?

**Emily Bernstein:** I took it between my junior and senior year, but it’s very abnormal.  You want to leave yourself time to take it more than once. For clinical programs, the earliest is OCtober 30th and the latest is Sepetmber 30th, so you want to set yourself up for sufccess.

**Dawn Sarno:** For H/F and cognitive programs, the guidelienes are later.

**Question from Sam:** For cutoff percentiles, one of the schools I was looking at said they preferred a score in the 70th percentile.  One of my sections was above that and one was below, do I still apply?

**Angie Leary:** In my case, they took my score at 50th even though they said the cutoff was 80th.  It depends on the program!

**Dawn Sarno:** 1 person can fail to meet the cutoff for the program, so faculty can fight for that one person to actually recruit them into the program depending on your qualities.

**Emily Bernstein:** Unless you can compensate with 4 publications and internships, the hard cutoff and huge numbers of applications help professors reduce the load of reading student applilcations.  UCF has 150 for the clinical program each year!

**Question from Student:** How much undergrad research experience did you have before appllying?

**Angie Leary:** I love UCF because I went here for undergrad!  It’s kind of unique, but I’m working with the same professor I was before and I had reseaarch and poster presentations.  Advanced research methods is also a really good class and counts as research experience. You don’t have to be ina lab to expereicence Research!

**Billy Volante:** If you work in a research lab you get to know grad students.  This becomes common knowledge to you as an advisor can help you find other grad students or professors to work with.  I stayed here working from undergrad to grad with the same professor. That is very uncommon!

**Emily Broksch:** I did my undergrad degree at UF, so the closest degree I got was management but I/O and management are very entwined.  My advisor is very prominent and he was the only reason I got in, as I networked and met with him there! In I/O, who you know goes a long way!  It’s a small field.

**Dawn Sarno:** I’m from Massachusetts and I went to a small state school.  The spring of my sophomore year I started an honors thesis. Having your own independent research is extremely valuable!  My advisor said I took advantage of every opportunity I could. You have lots of opportunities for research, and UCF has so many for conferences and conducting research.  There are so many research labs!

**Billy Volante:** For a lab, you might be able to take parts of research and present at conferences to make your name known.

**Emily Bernstein:** Use your research to do an honors in the major thesis!  You can do one your last year and it’s a very valuable experience!  For some labs, they want you to work in the lab before doing independent research with their faculty.  It’s a lot of work to mentor students! Get involved in a lab and form relationships early.

**Dawn Sarno:** If you’re a senior, don’t despair!  Early on you might not even know this information, and you might be at an impasse - but you can always do a post-bac experience such as with NIH or gettting research fellowships.  Don’t give up on grad school.

**Angie Leary:** If you’re at UCF you only need 2 semesters to do an honors thesis.  A lot of students do their thesis with people that don’t have labs! Reach out to faculty and ask about mentoring opportunities.  A lot of them are very willilng to mentor! Reach out and ask if you can do independent research too.

**Question from Jackie:** I’m personally stuck between going for my Master’s or Phd - were you guys ever tied between the two?

**Emily Bernstein:** I thought of doing a Master’s in mental health counseling, but I did an hononrs thesis and realized that research was what I wanted to do.  Would it bother me if I could do a Phd when I thought otherwise? If you don’t want to do resaesrch on a daily basis, don’t do a PHd. If you want to go into counseling, just get a master’s in counseling or social work.  If that’s not worth doing the research, a Master’s degree can go really far these days.

**Question from Student:** How much is the workload compared to undergrad?

Emily Brosch: I have so much work now doing two classes than four in undergrad.  In undergrad I was a TA and did research, etc. However, while I’m doing the same things now I’m trying to hold myself to a different standard.  It’s not a workload, it’s a lifestyle!

**Angie Leary:** I’m a first year and I finished unndergrad last year, but I’m still trying to transition and reform my study habits.  Quizlet doesn’t work as a study tool! It gets easier as you continue in grad school but the types of reading, and boalancing academics with research becomes a lot.  It becomes a cool balancing act though!j

**Emily Bernstein:** I’m a senior clinical student, and it becomes intrinsic rather than etrinsicc motivation that propels you through your degree.  I think the classes are the same workload as undergrad, but you’re juggling a lot more. Here you’re working 20 hr’s a week on teaching or a research grant, while you’re wdoign work for your dissertation or thesis and seeing patients for your labs and various clinics.  It’s a juggling act!

**Emily Broksch:** As you progress your workload gets heavier!  But you have more tools and experience to cope and expand what you’re doing, and the anxiety from being a nesw student vanishes.  You learn!

**Dawn Sarno:** Our programs differ significantly in the number of hours we spend on classes.  For H/F, we don’t want you coming to us with your problems! We take classes for 3 years, and you should look at the number of years you take classes in grad school for a given program.  Some classes are useful, but a lot of the time, you’d rather be in a lab doing your work. I really enjoy grad school but I’m really nervous about leaving grad school - I enjoy what I’m doing!  It’s fun, it doesn’t feel like I’m doing work. It depends on how much you love what you’re doing! I got more efficient, and something that used to take me 3 hours takes me 30 minutes now. You develop yoour skills and thinking!  Research ideas might go from taking months to form to an hour in a lab meeting!

**Billy Volante:** My biggest concern about grad school was can I make it?  Should I be doing this? In undergrad, I struggled with the workload of 4 or 5 classes.  The grad school classes and workload you’re doing is no longer memorizing and regurgitating information.  Some classes challenged me as details were important to know, but other classes were not detail-oriented and focused on discussion.  I looked at classes as the break from research I was doing!

**Dawn Sarno:** It really depends on your program and how applied/basic it is!  We like doing usability tesets with viedeo games, it’s not stressful!  In some classes we have to learn fine-grain neuroanatomy in rugged manner.  It varies on what you’re doing in your program.

**Question from Student:** For someone who enjoys neuroanatomy but doesn’t enjoy doing research, would you recommend Cog Psycch nad Human Factors.  You can do Cognitive Neuroscience, but UCF is somewhat limited in our faculties. Go neuro! But if you have applied interests, go Human Factors with someone who has applied contexts.

**Angie Leary:** I would not suggest a clinical program if you don’t have clinical interests.  Every program has some aspect of practicum.

**Emily Bernstein:** Every program I know has to see patients.

**Dawn Sarno:** Cognitive psych is really cool, as cog psych is broad and you can do things H/F does but it’s very diverse in scope.  The Hf program here is Both H/f

**Question from Salim:** What are some astounding gaps you want to remedy in your lines of research?

**Dawn Sarno:** Both of my lines of research are new, and we don’t study 3d environments a lot.  Our world is 3d, but omost visual studies are 3d! Cybersecurity is pretty hot, and NSF is dishing out money for Cybersecurity.  These are emerging fields! Cyber research has lots of gaps!

**Billy Volante:** A line of researech that I’ve done wrok in is automated driving, and perceptions of driving automated cars is way skewed from ewhat research studies are showing.  Tesla cars aren’t just completely automatic, they still rely on human interaciton to workk through. This is a huge area of research that needs to be worked on but hasn’t been!  We need to fix the public perception of what these automated mobiles are capable of. You don’t want poeple’s lives to be trusted as “sometimes.”

**Question from Student:** Do you guys wish you took a year off before grad school?  I

**Billy Volante:** I took the summer off but I still stayed in contact with labs and cooperated with research opportunities.

**Dawn Sarno:** I was so anxious when I started grad school- I wwas the youngest person I kneew and I moved all the way across the country.  Billy and I are engaged and we met in grad school. We help each other through it. I look at people my age, and they’re so much further along than I was.  If you wnat a career rin academics and want to go to an R1 School, taking a post-bac might be useful for a PPhd prgoram. You can get ahead of the game! While my advisor says I’m ready, I feel like I’m too young and don’t have enough publications to be ready for academia.

**Question from Student:** What are post-bacs for - I thought they were for people uninterested in grad school.

**Question from Dawn:** Poost-bacs are for the opposite!  You want to be prepared for research and a lot of post-bac programs lead into further academmic research.  In terms of research post-bacs, I’d be shocked if they did them to not go to grad school.

**Emily Bernstein:** A lot of the listings are for 1 or 2 years, because they know you’re moving on to bigger things and grad school potentially!

**Dawn Sarno:** Dont take a year off and work at the GAP!  Do something research related, because one year time of doing nothing won’t suit you for grad school.

**Billy Volante:** Make sure you’re focused on research!

**Emily Broksch:** I did a business administration minor, and it helped because the school didn’t have I/O!

**Angie Leary**: I did a stats minor and I’m a geek about it, but it’s really enjoyable for me!  Statistics definitely helps your resesarch and gives you ground on how to do data analysis specifically for oyour studies.

**Billy Volante:** I had a minor in cognitive sciences, I completely forgot about it but it gives a nice qualification on the side.  I think statistics is the best way to go, as those are the best use of free resources.

**Emily Bernstein**: I wish I did a statistics minor.

**Billy Volante and Dawn Sarno**: Computer science will teach you programming and experiment building, and when advisors see it on your CV and you can program in Python or C#, that’s a huge advantage for advisors looking into you.  There are some statistics classes you can take that have absolutely nothing to do with psychollogy, but I wouldn’t neccessarily take those classes over neuro or psych classes.

**Angie Leary**: The stats here is actually more applied than theoretical, and you can learn SPSS, STATA, and other programs - which might give you a good mix of computer science and statistics.

**Jackie Beretsky**: I’m a junior, and i have the requirements to graduate if I want early.  I’m doing my undergraduate thesis, and hoping to extend my deadline. Would you recommend taking your time in undergrad, or graduating early?

**Billy Volante and Emily Brosch:** Taking more time will allow you to hone in on your research interests, enjoy your work, and take stress off!

**Emily Bernstein:** Take enough classes to be full-time and get involved in internship or lab opportunities!

**Angie Leary:** I took a lot of research hours (9 credits) and a yoga class (3 credits).  Do things like that if you want to figure out your research and not overwhelm yourself!  It’s nice to take easy electives.

**Dawn Sarno:** I think that it’s totally reasonable to graduate early if you have time.  If you graduate early you can still do research and not have to pay for school.  You could have a job that’s relevant to your career instead of taking classes. My advisor would think that you’re very serious and made the most of your time without wasting money on tuition.  I wouldn’t take classes to just take classes!