Preparing for PhD

Applying to Psychology PhD graduate programs is very different than applying to any other graduate program. You really are applying to work under a research professor, not a program. It will require that you’ve already been interacting and connecting with a faculty doing research at the school you want to attend and learning from them if they have a grant available the year that you want to apply.

Why is it competitive? Because most PhD programs at a public university are fully funded: they pay you to be a graduate student in their program. Because of this only some faculty have grants available in the year you want to apply and the program accepts only about 5 students a year.

Do you have:

- Someone working on their PhD or already has their PhD that can mentor you?
- A great GPA? 3.5 or higher
- Extensive research experience? A research assistant position in a lab or two, for at least one year if not longer
- A research project like Honors Undergraduate Thesis (HUT)?
- Teaching experience? Being a teaching assistant with a professor helps as the grant you get paid with may require teaching undergraduate classes
- High scores on GRE or other necessary standardized test (some schools have been waiving this to encourage diversity)
- Do you even need a doctorate to do what you want to do or you are just looking for the title? Be sure you’ve done extensive research not only on your career choice, but yourself: evaluate your health, skills, values and interests

You will likely apply to at least 6-8 programs (again these are programs you’ve already been connecting with). Each graduate program may charge an application fee so application alone can be expensive

Should you get your Master’s degree first?

- **Pros**: gain more research experience, start on thesis, earn great grades, help guarantee acceptance into a competitive doctorate, may be all you need for career if get licensed with masters, or may decide to change careers
- **Cons**: extends timeline to doctorate, masters may be unpaid, you maybe retaking graduate level courses again as courses may not transfer towards doctorate

For Clinical Doctorate: Should you aim for PsyD instead of PhD?

- **Pros**: faster route to become a psychologist, more applied focus on doing therapy with patients, less competitive acceptance rates
- **Cons**: only few schools in Florida offer PsyD, only at private schools: expensive, may be “looked down upon” by PhD colleagues as they are less research focused, may limit job opportunities
- **It is highly recommended you still gain research experience at the undergraduate level to apply for PsyD programs**