

A Guide for Underrepresented Students Applying to Graduate Programs in Clinical Psychology

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Introduction

As current graduate students in clinical psychology, the authors of this article all remember when they decided to apply to graduate school, and how intimidating and mysterious the process appeared. Unless you have access to a close friend, family member, or mentor who has been through the process, it can be difficult to know what graduate school in clinical psychology is like, and how to prepare oneself for applying. As student members and representatives of American Psychological Association's Division 12, Section 6, the Clinical Psychology of Ethnic Minorities, we are particularly passionate about increasing the accessibility of training opportunities for ethnic minority clinical psychologists. Therefore, we decided to create this resource document to assist in the application process. Although this document is meant to be a resource for all prospective students, we try to focus throughout on topics that might be more specific to applicants from backgrounds that are underrepresented in psychology and higher education.

The first major question that needs the answer to before reading on is, *what is clinical psychology?* Clinical psychology is the area of psychology that focuses on mental health, broadly defined. Clinical psychologists can be involved in this field in a number of ways, for example through teaching, practicing as psychotherapists, or conducting research (for example, research interventions and treatments for various mental health disorders).

There are two options for doctoral degrees in psychology. PhD programs are typically focused on both research and practice, while PsyDs tend to emphasize clinical work much more than research. Both programs typically take between 4-6 years. Since PhD programs are usually at least partially funded (through things such as teaching assistantships and research assistantships), they are often more competitive in terms of admission. If you are not sure you want to commit to 4-6 years more school, there are a variety of master's programs that may interest you. *Mitch's Uncensored Advice for Applying to Graduate School in Clinical Psychology* has a great overview of some of these options: <http://mitch.web.unc.edu/files/2017/02/MitchGradSchoolAdvice.pdf>

As soon as you know you are interested in graduate school, make a timeline for yourself. If you're interested in a PhD program, you will likely need to be involved in some sort of research for at least a year or two before you apply (keep in mind you apply in the Fall and early Winter of the year before you want to start school, so work backwards from there in terms of your timeline). More information on research experience and how to find it is provided below. If you are interested in a PsyD program, it is important to consider doing at least a few months of clinical work prior to applying to

grad school. At least 6 months before your applications are due (usually November and December the year before you plan to go), you should be starting to plan for your GREs, letters of recommendation, and personal statements. More detail on all of these areas is given further on in this document. For more advice on timelines, check out these resources:

- <http://www.psychology.ucsd.edu/undergraduate-program/graduate-career-resources/applying-grad-school/application-process.html>
- <https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/psychology/files/PDF/diversitypdfs/A%20Students%20Perspective%20on%20Applying%20to%20Graduate%20School%20in%20Clinical%20Psychology.pdf>

Section 1. Applying to graduate school

If you've decided that Clinical Psychology is for you, it's time to start working towards applying! This first section will provide a general overview of the important parts of your application, and further sections will discuss some of these topics in more detail. First, you will need to decide what schools you want to apply for. One of the most useful resources for this process is the *Insider's Guide to Graduate Programs in Clinical and Counseling Psychology*. This book compiles various information about all graduate programs in clinical psychology, including their location, admissions statistics, foci of the program, and more. It also provides resources on the application process. There are many criteria to consider in program selection, including cost, location, and fit to your interests. It is up to you to decide how much weight to give each of these areas. Note that for PhD programs, you typically apply to work with one faculty member very closely. They advise you throughout your doctoral program, and you work on research with them. Therefore, it is very important that you pick someone with research interests that align with yours.

If you are applying for a PsyD program, it is important to check the training curriculum (these change by the program and are typically available on the university website) to ensure they meet your training needs. If you have a specific clinical area that you'd like to specialize in, it is wise to read the profiles of core faculty members to ensure you end up in a program where you'd receive the kind of training and the support you aspire to have. For example, if you identify as an ethnic minority student, you may be interested in learning about how much emphasis is placed upon topics such as multicultural competency and diversity in the curricula of the schools you choose to apply.

Once you have your final list (10-12 might be a good number), you will want to reach out to potential mentors. This is a great way to introduce yourself, as well as enquire if they are accepting students for the following year, since faculty do not always accept a student (often, for PhDs this depends on funding situations, or perhaps they are taking a sabbatical year. Note that for PsyDs you don't necessarily have to identify with a potential member prior to submitting applications, nevertheless, reaching out to faculty and learning about their specialties and/or about the program is advisable).

You will also need to go on each program's website to find their individual application components and deadlines. Although all programs have their own application, typically they ask for 3 letters of recommendation, GRE scores, and a personal statement. Some schools will also ask for additional essays, for example, discussing research or diversity. Some schools also require specific coursework, so be sure to check. Application fees tend to range from \$50-\$100 per application submission. Some programs do offer application fee waivers for low-income students. This information can usually be found on the program's website and if not available, it is worth emailing the program's staff to inquire about this. Lastly, the *Big Then Alliance FreeApp* program is designed for students from diverse intellectual, cultural, and social backgrounds to request a graduate application fee waiver for Ph.D. at participating universities. For more information visit: <https://www.btaa.org/resources-for/students/freeapp/introduction>

Section 2. Getting involved in research and other relevant opportunities

It is never too early to start seeking out research opportunities! Getting hands-on research experience is the best way to: 1) shape your research interests, 2) get familiar with the scientific process (e.g., testing a hypothesis, learning about research methodologies and statistics, and writing a manuscript), and 3) start building a network in the field.

How to get started - Research Opportunities

Volunteering

It is fairly common for undergraduate to volunteer in research labs. Paid research positions might be available as well, but these usually require a college degree and are far more limited and competitive to obtain. We will provide more details about these positions later in this section.

In order to ensure that you will be investing your time gaining valuable research experience, it might be a good idea to start identifying the kind of research that you are interested in. Although this can be done in different ways, one convenient way is by going online and reading professors' profiles and research articles. Once you have identified professors with similar research interests to yours, you can start taking the necessary steps to approach them.

Approaching professors

Email professors expressing interest in their research work and joining their lab. It is a good idea to include a resume/CV with your email. It might take some time to hear back from professors, so try to be patient. If you do not hear back within two weeks, then it may be a good idea to email professors again to follow up with them. Here is an example of this type of email:

Dear Dr. X,

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Giovanni Ramos. I am a senior psychology student at UNAM, who is interested in examining [Insert your research interest here. Try to link them to this potential mentor's work].

Based on your seminal work on [describe Dr. X's work], I would like to inquire if there are potential positions as an RA in your team. I have attached my CV for your consideration. I am more than happy to answer any question regarding my training, professional goals, and research experiences.

Thank you in advance for your time. I am looking forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,

Giovanni Ramos

In addition to emailing professors, signing up for classes with them is another great way to meet them in person. Make sure to ask relevant questions during and after lecture and go to office hours!

After you have expressed interest in joining a lab and applied for a research assistant position, you should expect to be invited for an interview. This means that you will have to get ready to face your interview. Be prepared to answer questions such as:

*Why do you want to join this lab? What are your research interests? How are you going to contribute to the lab? What are your educational goals and how does this lab will help you achieve these? **DO NOT just say, "Well, I wanna join your lab because I wanna go to grad school and need research experience."** Be prepared to talk about your personal experiences (as per your level of comfort) when appropriate and link it to your research interests or current global issues that may be inspiring you to do particular research. For example, if you are an immigrant and if you are interested in researching about on the resilience of immigrants, it is appropriate to tie your personal experiences to your research interests. In fact, many interviewers would appreciate such personal connections.*

If for some reason, professors are unavailable, try reaching out to their graduate students. Graduate students often need undergrads to help them with their research, so it might be easier to approach graduate students instead since they have full autonomy in who they select to help them! Just remember to be mindful of their time and approach them in a professional manner in your email. Alternatively, get in touch with the lab manager. In some labs, a lab manager coordinates recruitment, oversee research projects and typically serve as a great resource for helping out prospective candidates.

Getting involved in research programs and internships

Another great way to gain research experience is through research programs and internships. These opportunities provide an intensive research experience for a small

number of students and usually require students to submit a final research paper or presentation. Although these research programs and internships tend to be highly competitive and selective, they can certainly bolster your research curriculum. There are two main types of research program opportunities:

Undergraduate Research Programs—take place concurrently with your undergraduate education. In addition, these opportunities can provide excellent resources, such as information on how to apply to grad school, grad school seminars, as well as stipend or scholarship opportunities.

- *McNair Research Scholars Program*: funded by the Department of Education at 151 institutions across the United States, the McNair Scholars Program is designed to prepare undergraduate students from underrepresented backgrounds for doctoral studies through involvement in research and other scholarly activities. While not available at all academic institutions, this program guides students through the process of developing their own research project. For more information visit: <https://mcnairscholars.com/>
- Check with your academic institution/department for undergraduate research program opportunities!

Summer Research Internships—often times available for both undergraduate and postgraduate applicants. Summer research internships grant an opportunity to work closely with a principal investigator (PI) as you gain experience conducting research. These opportunities may sometimes include a stipend to help you fund your living and traveling expenses.

See the following summer internship opportunities for underrepresented students:

- *REU: Social Network Analysis for Solving Minority Health Disparities*
<https://www.unl.edu/summerprogram/health>
- *Summer Program for Undergraduate Research (SPUR)*
<http://spsp.org/events/summer-opportunities-for-students/SPUR>
- Pathways to Science website. This website lists several research opportunities at all levels (e.g., undergraduate, post bacc, graduate)
<http://pathwaystoscience.org/>

For additional undergraduate research opportunities visit APA's website:

<http://www.apa.org/education/undergrad/research-opportunities.aspx>

Departmental Honors Program

Most departments offer senior honors programs to give undergraduates an opportunity to conduct research under the guidance of a faculty advisor to complete a full thesis. Often times students who successfully complete the program will earn an "Honors" or

"Highest Honors" notation on their diploma! Check with your department for eligibility criteria, program specifics, and opportunities to receive credit units.

Post-baccalaureate

Post-bacc programs in psychology are designed for students who have a bachelor's degree and who are seeking additional preparation for psychology-oriented graduate programs and careers. Post-baccs are generally one to two years in duration and provide extensive research training through hand-on research assistantships and/or research training courses. Paid opportunities may be available for these programs. You can use the Pathways to Science to identify potential programs.

Paid research positions

Although far more limited and competitive to secure, paid research assistantships provide a glance into the workforce in the field of psychological research. These opportunities, both full-time or part-time, offer a stable salary, so that you can solely focus on gaining research experience and producing research. It is recommended that you start looking into these positions early before graduation and that you have prior research experience. It is also important to mention that paid research assistantships might require you to relocate to other states, so keep this in mind as you search for these opportunities.

Attending research conferences

There are several research conferences taking place throughout the year. Attending these conferences will grant you opportunities to network, get a better idea of what kind of research is being done, and, of course, showcase your research projects. While it may be expensive to attend national conferences, there are undergrad research conferences available, which are usually free of cost (a fee for abstract submission may apply). The most common types of presentations at research conferences are oral and poster presentations. There tends to be more slots available for poster presentations than those for oral presentations. In addition, submissions for oral presentations generally include well-designed research proposals that have resulted in manuscripts accepted for publication. Therefore, make sure to wisely choose your presentation type when submitting an abstract to a research conference. It is also worth looking into student registration fees and travel fund opportunities when considering attending a research conference.

See the following list for conferences in psychological sciences:

Council of University Directors of Clinical Psychology (CUDCP):

<https://cudcp.wildapricot.org/DCP>

<http://psychology.ucmerced.edu/node/117>

One of the largest psychological conferences every year is the annual conference of the American Psychological Association (APA). In addition, many divisions (based on specialized interests) of APA host their own annual conferences around the country across the year. Your chances of receiving support, encouragement, and building networking opportunities at these divisional conferences would typically be much higher than at national conferences. Moreover, some divisions offer mentorship programs which will help you set off in your journey. Here's more information on Div. 12 - Society

for Clinical Psychology's mentorship program: <https://www.div12.org/students/scp-mentorship-program/>

How to Get Started - Clinical Opportunities

If you are focused on applying for a PsyD program, it is advisable to gain some clinical experience prior to applying to grad school (however, please note that just because you are applying for a PsyD program, it doesn't mean you should forget about research. If you had to choose one of the two between clinical and research experience for a PsyD then, we recommend clinical). Here are some easy steps to making this happen:

1. Make a list with areas of your clinical interests.
2. Once you have this list handy, do an online search for organizations (these could be hospitals, outpatient care facilities, private practices, non-profit organizations, government and/or national organizations) that provide psychological services and treatments in your area(s) of interest.
 - a. Be mindful of the geographical location of these organizations as you may be required to travel there a few times a week
 - b. Decide how many hours a week you could devote for clinical work
3. Next, look for mental health professional listed in these websites. Identify what their job role is and what areas of expertise they list down. If their profiles match with your interests, reach out to them via email or phone to express your interest to volunteer or shadow their work. Alternatively, contact the human resource or talent acquisition departments of the relevant organizations to express your interest.

It is worthy to note that securing clinical position often takes time. Depending on the organization, the application process may entail additional background checks, medical clearances, and vaccination requirements. So, allow yourself plenty of time to look for these opportunities before it's time to apply to grad school. You may also find it beneficial to speak to students at the universities you are applying. They are likely to know more about the types of organizations that accept students for training purposes.

Section 3. Personal Statement

At this point in your application, you know what schools you are interested in. You have chosen some programs where you think you would receive the training that you are looking for, and more importantly, where you believe you would be productive and happy. Now it is time for you to get them to choose you! Even though the grad school application is a holistic process in which grades, previous experiences, and letters of recommendation all play a role, your personal statement is a unique opportunity to differentiate yourself from the rest of the applicants. As such, you have two single-spaced pages (approximately 1000 words) to highlight your qualifications and relevant experiences, state your research interests and long-term goals clearly, at the same time that you tell a cohesive story that expresses why you are passionate about this field and are the best option for that lab/program among a bunch of very qualified candidates... Intimidating? It does not need to be! Though there is no simple recipe for the perfect

statement of purpose, these are some tips that can help you write the piece that will get you that interview invitation!

Before talking about what to (or not) include in your statement of purpose, we believe there are some general guidelines that anyone can benefit from:

- 1) **Take your time to write your statement of purpose.** Really, take your time! It is possible that you have been thinking about going to grad school for a long time already; maybe you have a clear idea of what your research would look like if admitted to X or Y program; but unfortunately, this does not mean that writing your statement will be easy and swift. It is better to start really early to have time to write multiple drafts and restructure it as needed. Re-writing is going to be a big part of preparing your statement of purpose. To do so, you want to get feedback from your mentor(s), grad students, and peers. Getting feedback from people who have gone through this process before, and review applications on a regular basis can be invaluable. Do not hesitate to reach out and ask them to review your drafts!
- 2) **Be organized and pay attention to detail.** Do not take this for granted! Start early to think of an outline of all the information you want to include (e.g., relevant experiences, awards) and create drafts for every program you are applying to. None of the program would be happy to receive a statement where you mentioned a faculty from another university! Programs also perceive negatively any grammatical or punctuation mistake. The program assumes that this statement is a good representation of your work and that you have devoted as much or as little time as you thought necessary. Since the grad school application process entails many different steps, it is easy to make mistakes. Keep your work organized and proofread and proofread again.
- 3) **Do your research.** Learn as much as you can about the program you are applying to, as well as the prospective mentor and his/her lab. This is information that you need to integrate in your statement to convince your audience that you know why you want to be part of X or Y program and work with Dr. Z. Show them that you have done your homework and you really know what you would be getting into if you were accepted.

Having those things in mind, it's time to talk about how to write your statement.

Normally, a statement of purpose has at least three main sections: 1) the introduction (A.K.A the hook), 2) the body (where you state all your relevant experiences), and 3) the ending (the section in which you briefly summarize why all those experiences have led you to choose that program and that mentor to achieve your long-term goals). Again, though this is not a rigid script that you have to follow, all statements of purpose contain this information. Finally, we recommend that you read about some mistakes that are considered "Kisses of Death" in writing your statement of purpose (https://psychology.unl.edu/psichi/Graduate_School_Application_Kisses_of_Death.pdf). Be familiar with them so you can avoid them at any cost!

The introduction is probably one of the most important sections in the statement. Here you have the opportunity to catch your reader's attention (that is why the name of "the hook") by telling something about yourself, your goals, and why you want to be part of that program. Normally, in this section you can connect your personal experiences with your research interests. The introduction is where you tell your unique story and how this has inspired you to pursue a career in Clinical Psychology. Just a note of warning: Though strong personal experiences could have led you to this path, keep in mind that your statement is still a professional piece of writing. As such you want to link any personal information to your goals and research interests. Self-disclosing for the sake of it could actually hurt your chances of being admitted as it can be negatively perceived. Finally, you can think of this section as an abstract of your entire statement as it includes all relevant information about your application (i.e., who you are, why you chose this field, why you want to apply to this program, and your goals).

In the body you include all the information about your experiences and goals. Here you want to mention those relevant clinical and/or research experiences that have prepared you to pursue this degree. Moreover, you want to make clear how such experiences are connected to your actual goals and research interests. Even when your previous experiences are not closely related to the type of research you want to do in the future, you need to create that connection. For example, working in an early development lab might have not directly prepared you to work with adults suffering depression, but you have developed skills that are transferable (i.e., organizational, data analytic strategies, recruitment procedures, working with study participants) and valuable in any lab! Thus, in this section you want to be very descriptive of what you have done, but more importantly of what you have learned and how you will use this new skills/knowledge if accepted in the program. Finally, you want to avoid a common mistake in this section: Writing a summary of your CV. Yes, you need to say what you have accomplished so far, but again focus on *what you have learned and how those skills will serve you during grad school*. We also recommend that you read the "Statement of Purpose" section of Mitch's guide (<https://www.depauw.edu/files/resources/mitchs-grad-school-advice-for-clinical-psych.pdf>). In it he does a better job at describing why it is so important to stay what you have learned during each experience/position/program you have been in.

Now it is time to finish your masterpiece... the ending! At this point anyone who has been reading your statement knows who you are, why you want to get a doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology, and the experiences that have prepared you to do so. However, you still need to make sure that there is no doubt in your reader's mind about why you chose that program and specific mentor. Here is when you will use all the information that you have gathered before. You need to mention the type of research that you would like to conduct and how it aligns with your prospective mentor's line of research. Describe what you know about this faculty's work and how you see yourself expanding on that work. It is always nice to mention one or two current lab projects and some ideas about how you can collaborate if accepted. In short, mention people's and projects' names; be specific. This serve a multiple function: 1) show your research thinking (i.e., you can formulate possible project ideas), 2) demonstrate that you chose that program carefully, and 3) communicate how excited you are about working with

Professor X (any parallel is just mere coincidence). More than anything, and despite of whether you are applying for a PhD or PsyD you want to convince your readers that you want to be part of that program. No one really wants to interview someone who considers their program their second or third option. It is okay to have top choices, but at this point in the application you want to get as many interviews as possible.

We hope this helps you organize and write your own statement of purpose. Keep in mind that these are recommendations and not absolute truths. Use your common sense, and more importantly, the guidance of good mentors.

Section 4. Curriculum Vitae

Curriculum Vitae means “course of life.” As such, this professional document is a thorough, updated, and detailed account of your experiences. In reality, the authors of this guide like to think of the CV as a “screenshot” of who you are. Since this is a document that you will need at different stages of the grad school application process (e.g., from contacting a prospective mentor for the first time, to submitting your final application), you want your CV to convey the most important information about you and your skills.

Fortunately, there are clear conventions about what to (and not to) include in your CV. We know that some of you already have a CV; we also expect that for some of you this is the first time you will be writing a document like this. We still hope this very short guidelines will help you organize, present your information, and polish the format of your own CV!

First let's talk about the DOs and DON'Ts of writing your vitae.

DOs

- Use concise writing throughout your CV as every word counts. Avoid using passive voice when describing your experiences. In fact, there is a good list of verbs that you can use to describe some of your abilities such as management/leadership skills, research skills, writing abilities, and technical qualifications (<http://cas2.umkc.edu/psychology/undergrad/files/GradSchoolSurvivalGuideSS11.pdf>)
- Get CVs from people more advanced in their professional trajectories (e.g., graduate students, mentors) and see how they have structured their vitae. You will see that even though there are many similarities, the sections/experiences differ based on the level of seniority. Keep in mind that when you are writing your own: Your CV will not look like the one from the second-year grad student who is helping you. That person's CV also does not look like their mentor's!
- Use a template that clearly organizes the sections of your CV. You can even use a grad student's or your mentor's CV as template. In fact, you will realize that the more CVs you look at, the fewer differences you will find. People in the field tend to stick to a limited number of formats for their CVs.

- Proofread, proofread, and proofread your CV! This document needs to be error-free as it reflects your work and attention to detail.
- Ask grad students and mentors to review your CV and provide feedback. They will find weak areas, and some that you may have overworked. Sometimes they will provide suggestions based on personal differences, though. Try to ask several people and see if you can see patterns in the feedback you receive. If more than one person says that you need to address something, it is very likely that you really need to do so!
- List your experiences in chronological order from most recent to first. Keep this same order across sections. In fact, consistency in format across all sections in your CV is a must.
- List your mentors and supervisors. Clinical Psychology is a field when people know one another. This also helps prospective mentors know the type of research and methods that you are familiar with.

DON'Ts

- Do not give the impression of padding your CV. The people who will review this document has being doing this for long enough that they will be able to see if that is the case. Just talk about your experience in an honest, descriptive, but concise manner.
- Do not include irrelevant personal information. Your CV is about your professional experiences and reviewers do not need to know about your age, marital status, hobbies, or high-school accomplishments (unless you receive a very prestigious award back then).
- Do not list sections/subheadings with only one item. The only exception is the section of "Peer-Reviewed Publications" since it is not expected that you will have many of these.
- Do not send the same CV for each program. Tailor each document in order to make it more appealing to your audience.

Finally, when writing your CV keep in mind the type of program you are applying to. This will help you decide the order of the sections in this document. For example, if you are applying to a program with a Clinical Science approach, you definitely want to prioritize your research accomplishments (e.g., publications, professional presentations) over your clinical experiences. On the other hand, if you are applying to a clinically oriented program (e.g., Psy.D) you will want to highlight your clinical experiences (e.g., summer camp counselor, screening of participants) over your research training.

Here are links with some CV samples from students at different stages of their training:

- https://www.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/files/CV_PhD_ClinicalPsych2009_1345061368.pdf
- <https://www.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/files/PhDClinPsyMMC.pdf>

Here is a more advanced CV sample:

- <https://www.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/files/PhDClinPsyMMC.pdf>

This article elaborates improvements that can be made to CVs:

- <https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-CV-Doctor-Is-Back-/49086>

Section 5. Letters of recommendation

Most clinical programs require that you submit at least three letters of recommendation. In order to ensure that your letters are submitted by the application deadlines, you should be able to identify potential letter writers well before you start working on your applications. Now, who should you ask to write your letters of recommendation? Strong letters of recommendation tend to be best written by people who actually know you and your work style, such people can be research mentors, professors (preferably in the field of psychology), lab coordinators, or supervisors. It is your responsibility to notify letter writers about the programs that you will be applying and upcoming deadlines. It might also be helpful to provide letter writers (especially those who you haven't worked with in a while) with a list of projects in which you participated and the skills you utilized. It is also highly recommended that you provide your letter writers with your personal statement, CV/resume, and transcripts.

For more information on letters of recommendation

visit: <http://www.psychology.ucsd.edu/undergraduate-program/graduate-career-resources/applying-grad-school/rec-letters.html>

Section 6. Preparing for the GRE

Along with GPA, GRE scores can be frequently used as important indicators of success in graduate school. The General GRE exam consists of two AWA Essay sections (30 min each), 2 Verbal sections (30 min each), 2 Math sections (35 min each), and one experimental section, which can be either Verbal or Math. Several companies offer courses and books such as Princeton Review, Kaplan, and Manhattan Prep. Verbal and Quantitative scores of students who have applied and have been admitted into competitive programs usually exceed the 75th percentile. However, admissions committees may consider *lower scores* due to cultural and language limitations and biases. It is important to remember that the higher your score on the GRE, the better. As such, give yourself plenty of time to study for this test. Some people study for a couple of months and still feel that they could've used more time! Even though there is no "best way" to study for this test, here are some tips that we have found helpful:

1. Focus on learning how to beat the test and not on learning all quant/verbal material. You will soon realize that the amount of info that you would need to know to answer every possible question in the GRE is almost impossible to learn. It is more important that you get familiar with the GRE format and practice against time. Keep in mind that you don't need perfect scores, just *good enough* scores. A good resource for this is Magoosh (<https://gre.magoosh.com/>), which is not free but may be a good investment.
2. Related to the first point, use mock test to practice as much as possible. Try to take one of these before you start studying to see where you are at. You will see that one of the most stressful things about taking the GRE is the time component... This is the best way to get used to it! There are several free resources that are similar to the real deal. The best one is POWERPREP

(https://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/prepare/powerprep/), which uses past real GRE exams! You can find some more on the internet.

3. If you have plenty of time. You can allocate time to polish your skills in certain areas while still learning new material in your weak areas. If you have limited time, you may be better off focusing on your strengths since it is not very likely you will learn new material in short periods of time. Plan accordingly.
4. If you can afford to take the GRE more than once you should! There's even nice research supporting the benefits of this approach (i.e., practice effect). This area of research seems to suggest that after taking it 3 times it's very unlikely you will further improve your scores. However, there is a significant increase from 1st to 2nd, and a slight increase from 2nd to 3th.
5. Take breaks and focus on other parts of your application. Try to give yourself time to practice, but to also disengage from practicing. While not studying for the GRE, you can work on your statement of purpose, getting your letters of rec, etc.

Lastly, if raising GRE scores is not practical or realistic, then the next major area that is helpful is independent research.

For more information and resources for the GRE visit:

<http://www.psychology.ucsd.edu/undergraduate-program/graduate-career-resources/applying-grad-school/gre-prep.html>

The Psychology GRE

The Psychology GRE is not required for most clinical Ph.D. programs, but it is highly recommended to take for applicants who have not majored in psychology. If required, you can think of the Psychology GRE as kind of a formality rather than a decisive factor in your application. However, some programs are starting to require the Psychology GRE, so you should try to prepare for this test. Some available prep books are GRE Subject Test: Psychology (Kaplan) and Cracking the GRE Psychology (Princeton Review).

GRE Fee Reduction Program

ETS offers a 50% discount on the regular test fee for "individuals who demonstrate financial need and for national programs that work with underrepresented groups." For eligibility requirements and more information visit:

https://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/about/fees/reductions/

If you are a McNair Scholar, the program will pay for the GRE fees!

Section 7. Interview Process

Getting invited to interview is a great achievement and one that you should be proud of yourself! Several programs invite a select group of outstanding applicants to visit campus and interview with faculty. When scheduling interviews you may have conflicting interview dates. If this is the case, always inquire about alternate interview dates; some programs can be flexible about this. During interview day, you will be expected to be on your best behavior, ably answer questions in detail and interact with other students and faculty. You should diligently prepare for this day as it might be

decisive in determining whether you will be accepted into a program. We recommend that you review your application materials (i.e., personal statement and application), so that you can showcase and elaborate on the information that you provided when interviewed. Next, you should research the program, faculty, department, labs, papers, etc. This will allow you to feel more comfortable and formulate relevant questions during interview day. Applicants are usually given a schedule of interview day a few days in advance, so if you receive one, make sure to tailor your research accordingly. Lastly but not in the least, practice your interview skills by having friends, relatives, mentors, acquaintances ask you questions (see list below). We are including a list of common question that you may encounter during interview day:

1. How did you become interested in Clinical Psychology?
2. What are your personal strengths and weaknesses in the research process?
3. What are your research interests? How did you get interested in this topic?
4. What are your clinical interest areas?
5. What draws you to this program?
6. How do you see our program fitting with your career goals?
7. Why do you want to get a Ph.D.?
8. What do you know about my research? Why are you interested in working in my lab?
9. What are your goals after graduate school? In five or ten years?
10. What would be the hardest thing about graduate school for you?
11. What skills are the most important in a researcher?
12. What are the advantages to you of this program?
13. What worries you about coming to this program?
14. What might you not get at this program that you want?
15. Why should we choose you instead of other candidates for this program? What makes you stand out from other candidates?
16. If funding was not an issue, what project would you develop/start?

Paying for Traveling Expenses (travel funds, lodging options)

Funding for traveling can be quite limited, but it is important to mention that depending on the program, you may or may not be financially reimbursed for the cost of travel. So you should check with the program's department for travel funds available for underrepresented students. If travel funds are not available and you do not have the financial means to cover your travel expenses, then you should consider doing a telephone/video interview. In terms of lodging options, grad students usually host applicants. However, if this is not the case, you might want to consider sharing a room with other applicants.

For more information about graduate admissions interviews visit:

<http://www.psychology.ucsd.edu/undergraduate-program/graduate-career-resources/applying-grad-school/interviews.html>

Section 8. Making a decision

So you've gotten some offers, and now it's time to make that decision. Many students don't realize how stressful or anxiety provoking this process can get! But it doesn't necessarily have to be stressful. By going to grad school we accept that we will spend the next 4-6 years of our lives dedicated to the program we choose. In that light, answering a few questions would help you arrive at your decision. For example, you could ask questions such as:

- 1) How did students, faculty and staff make you feel at the interview? Did the overall atmosphere at the program as well as the ambience in the larger university speak to you? If so, how?
- 2) What are strengths and weakness of each program?
- 3) How much money does it cost or how much assistantship/stipends are available to you?
- 4) Does the program offer any scholarships that you are eligible to receive? (Note: some universities offer diversity scholarships. Don't forget to ask them about it!)
- 5) Which schools best represent and value the aspects of diversity that you identify with?
- 6) Where is the school located? (Non-single students may want to do thorough research to answer this question!)
 - a. How much does rent cost?
 - b. What are typical living arrangements like?
 - c. Will you need to buy or maintain a car while you attend school? If you are planning to work part-time, what kind of opportunities are most available to you/your partner/family in this area?
- 7) How far away will you be from your family, friends and significant others?

Some students prefer to write answers to above questions on an excel sheet, color coordinate their most to least preferred answers (for example, green for answers they really liked; red for least favorite; orange for not too bad) so as to create a visual representation of the most desirable outcomes. Of course, the kind of questions you should ask before making a decision varies from person to person.

You may also want to revisit program websites, ask more questions from students, faculty, and staff before making a commitment. If you haven't clarified anything about the clinical training process, dissertation completion or applying for internships this may be a good time to talk to your prospective programs about that. You may also want to explore additional facilities at the program such as accessibility to electronic journals, free subscriptions to software, availability of recreational facilities and anything else that would help your grad school experience a comfortable one.

The last piece of advice for making a decision is 'Don't be shy to ask!!!' It is better to get all the clarifications you need before committing to a program than becoming disappointed at the end. So, ask away those questions from as many people as possible until you get the answers you need.

Section 9. What to do if you do not get into a program

Not getting accepted into a clinical program the first time is fairly common and you should not feel discouraged from reapplying after your first attempt. If you decide to reapply, we recommend that you take a much-deserved break prior to putting together a stronger application for the next application cycle.

We also recommend doing the following:

1. First, you should definitely consider re-taking the GREs. It is understandable if finances are an issue; however, finding a way to finance it could help you in the end.
2. Secondly, you might want to revise and edit your personal statement and get feedback from people who have not reviewed your statement previously.
 - Feel free to reach out to program directors and/or mentors to request feedback in regard to your application materials.
3. Third, get more research experience! Evidence of independent research can always help to argue that publications and poster presentations are much better indicators of success in grad school than GRE scores.
4. Lastly, reconsider your research/clinical fit with other programs/advisors that may have not been initially included in your list. Edit and revise your list of graduate programs as much as needed.

On behalf of the students who contributed to the writing of this guide, we commend you on all of your academic efforts and pursuits! We genuinely hope that this guide contributes to the knowledge and academic journeys of ethnic/racial minority students, as well as the joint faculty-student efforts to diversify the field of clinical psychology.