Q. **When should I begin the process of applying to graduate school?**
A. There is a lot of thought and planning necessary to get you to the point of putting an application in the mail.

- You need to collect information about psychological specialties and decide where your interests lie. The Career Center can help with this. You may also want to take the Jan Term Careers in Psychology course.
- You need to collect information about graduate programs in your area of interest.
- You need to develop your credentials so you are an attractive candidate to graduate programs.

All of these take time. Ideally, you should begin collecting graduate school information during your freshman or sophomore year. You should be making decisions about what programs to apply to when you are a junior. Applications should be complete and in the mail by Thanksgiving of your senior year. Starting later doesn’t mean you won’t go to graduate school but it will limit your choices.

Q. **What do you mean “develop my credentials”?**
A. Graduate schools will be looking for certain things.

- Some graduate schools require that you complete specific courses as an undergraduate before you can be admitted to their programs. This is one reason you should begin looking at grad schools early to make sure you can take the courses you need. However, completion of a major in psychology at LaGrange College will give you the courses most schools will expect you to have.
- Research experience is a big plus for most grad schools and an absolute requirement for the better programs. Research experience also gives an advantage in landing paid assistantships that can cut your tuition in half (or more).
- Practical experience from internships or volunteer experiences will move you up on the list of candidates for admission and is especially important if you are pursuing a degree in counseling.
- A successful application will show you were involved in psychology beyond just taking courses. Become a student affiliate of APA. Join PSI CHI, if you are eligible.

Q. **When should I take the Graduate Record Exam (GRE)?**
A. Most psychology graduate programs ask that a GRE score accompany your application. Some programs even have minimum scores for you to be considered for admission. Taking the GRE in the summer after your junior year and getting your score will give you information you need to assess your chances of being admitted to programs you are interested in. It will also give you time to retake the test if you need a higher score. LaGrange College offers a GRE Prep course in January which you should plan to take before you take the test. Check with the Career Center for Details.

Also, be aware that some programs use the Miller Analogies Test (MAT) instead of the GRE. These will be mostly school or educational psychology programs or counseling programs which are housed in a school or department of education. You may also find some programs require the GRE psychology subtest.

Q. **What is the most important thing to consider when selecting a graduate program?**
A. All good psychology graduate programs, even applied programs (clinical, counseling, I/O, etc.) focus on research. Expect to be working in a faculty member’s lab and contributing to his or her research. When deciding where to apply, look at the research interests of the faculty. Pick schools where they are studying the topics that interest you. When you write a personal statement make sure you emphasize your
research interests and how they match up with the interests of specific faculty members. Admission decisions are based, in part, on the research interests you express. Programs want good students who are interested in the things they are best equipped to teach. A well-qualified student who is not interested in the work being done by a program’s faculty won’t be admitted.

Q. I love Georgia and the Southeast. I should probably stick to graduate schools in this part of the country. Right?
A. Wrong. The most important criterion in selecting a graduate program is what they can teach you, not where it’s located. Also, consider that: 1. Programs outside the Southeast often have more assistantship money to offer. 2. This is the best time in your life to broaden your horizons and see other parts of the country or the world. Many other places are very different from the Southeastern U.S. and it’s good to experience that. 3. If you expect to become a college professor, most schools do not hire their own graduates and many look for graduates from other parts of the country. This brings fresh perspectives to their campuses. 4. Some programs may be interested in a diverse student body. For these programs, being an out-of-state applicant may be an advantage. If you want to live in the Southeast, consider getting your degree somewhere else.

Q. How many programs should I apply to?
A. A recent survey by the American Psychological Association (cited in “Eye on Psi Chi”, Spring 2004) showed an overall acceptance rate of 38%. Therefore, a rough rule of thumb is “at least 5” to be reasonably sure you will be admitted somewhere. However, be aware that acceptance rates vary widely with type of program. Clinical Ph.D. programs are the most competitive with an acceptance rate of a little over 10%. Ten or more applications would be about right for these programs. On the other hand, for general/experimental master’s programs, the rate is about 58%. You can probably be admitted to at least one of these with 4 or 5 applications. You should discuss this with your advisor and with the Career Center.

Q. Some graduate programs have application deadlines in April or May. If I’m interested in them, can I wait until then to apply?
A. Maybe. But, consider that some programs begin making admission decisions before their deadlines and there may not be many slots left if you wait to apply. Also, some programs make decisions about assistantships earlier than their application deadlines. If you wait, you could be admitted but not get any money. A good rule is to complete the application process by Thanksgiving of your senior year regardless of application deadlines.

Q. Is there anything else to consider?
A. Lots! As soon as you know you are interested in graduate school, begin a conversation with your psychology advisor and with the LaGrange College Career Center. We can help you a great deal when it comes to finding grad school information and getting through the application process. Also read publications like:


Copies are available in the LaGrange College Library or can be purchased from the American Psychological Association.

If you still aren’t admitted to your first choice program, consult www.apa.org/students for a list of graduate programs which have vacancies. This list is normally posted in May.

Get started early and be persistent and you are very likely to find the graduate program that is right for you.