

Graduate School Panel Meeting Minutes

Panelists:

Dr. Shannon Ciesla, Associate Prof. in Dept. of Psychological Sciences

Dr. Jeff Ciesla, Research Faculty, Dept. Psychological Sciences

Christina, 3rd year PhD student in Clinical Psychology

Christian, MPH student and GA on campus, in McNair Scholars program

1. Why did you decide to pursue a graduate degree? What were some factors that influenced your decision?

Christian: has wanted to go into a PhD student and felt that it was necessary to achieve what he wanted.

Christina: interested after a child and trauma class. I want to be a clinical scientist.

Dr. Jeff: found out he loves research and hates people.

Dr. Shannon: started out in biology, then found a love for psych and pursued a PhD in clinical psychology

2. What are the main qualities or experiences that psychology graduate programs are looking for in their applicants?

Dr. S: depends on what you wanna go to grad school for. Research experience is super important so try to get into a research lab! You'll find out if you love or hate research and you'll get connections. Also have high grades and some hands-on experience.

Dr. Jeff: Masters may be different from doctorate, but need 3 letters of rec from profs who know you. If you want to get a doctorate in clinical psych, you should try to get into 3 different labs.

Christina: research is the biggest thing they're looking for. Having posters or honors theses is important!

Christian: strong academics, letters or recommendation, and research

3. What are some of the big factors to consider in choosing a program (in terms of academics, overall environment of the lab, etc)?

Christians: feeling welcomed and faculty

Christina: Research fit! Make sure you like the topic and lab (personality or mentor and other you're working with), gathered usually at the interview stage.

a. In choosing Masters vs. PhD?

Dr Jeff: really find out what your end goal is and then figure out the program and school that will get you there. You don't wanna go to grad school. You should want a career that requires you to go to grad school. If you get a doctorate, no one will call you Dr.

Shannon: should be dictated on what you wanna do after you get that degree. Therapy but no research? Don't get a PhD or PsyD because you'll be miserable. Get a masters to be a licensed clinician instead. Environment is important. Please make sure the mentor is a good fit for you, especially if you're going into a research based program.

4. How can students reach out to the school/department they're interested in (past the generic info sessions)-- ie meeting with faculty or shadowing classes. What's the best way to reach out for that?

Shannon: there will be an admissions coordinator or prog director who will be your point person for your general questions.

Dr. Jeff: if you wanna know what is happening in a lab, ask the potential mentor. Not all doctoral programs work like ours. Committee models are more common for masters and clinical programs. Send an email out to get your foot in the door and let them know you're interested. Keep it simple and brief. Don't go too far until the interview stage.

5. How many programs should you apply to?

Christian: only applied to Kent, but suggests 5-10. Apply to what's interesting to you.

Christina: applied to 10, but most people she knows did closer to 15. 10-15 is good for doctoral programs.

Dr. J: masters 3-5 programs. 10-15 for doctoral. Behavioral neuroscience ~10. If GPA is lower, apply to more schools. Look for how many students apply and are accepted each year because it's required by the APA.

Dr. S: depends on how competitive you are

6. How far in advance should you start prepping for applications? What should you prepare first?

Dr. S: ASAP! But, get a head start! If due Dec, get started in summer by writing a personal statement and line of letters of rec. Months in advance!

Dr. J: equivalent of 1 class.

Christina: late aug early sept. most schools don't say what profs are taking a student or not till then.

Christian: start looking at the end of summer early semester. The earlier the better, you'll have less stress!!

7. How should you reach out to ask for letters of recommendation? What are professors/ advisors looking for?

Shannon: Provide as much info as possible! Don't assume exactly how long they've known you. Easier to say no in email, so have a convo with them in person.

Jeff: agrees with Shannon. Ask for letters when you're done working in the lab instead of when you're applying to grad school. Easier for professors to forget after a year or two.

Christina: worked with 3 different research faculty. Asked them around fall when applying to grad school and gave them info on tracks of program applying to and bullet points of projects you worked on under them.

Christian: used research mentors from undergrad. Keep relationships with faculty during undergrad. Connections are key, make sure you keep those through undergrad, they're really important.

8. Do you need to show your transcript/CV?

Shannon: send a personal statement to the professor when asking for faculty. Include cv. Add overall acad rec and incl if you had anything that caused a major slip in grades for a sem or two.

Jeff: CV shouldn't be a copy of transcript. You need to have experiences and personal statements. Let the professor know your goals for where.

9. How does the interview process go?

- a. What tips do you have for students when approaching the interview process?

Christian: had in person interviews but some programs do virtually now. Be on ur best beh at all times. They notice lang and manner u use. Be mindful of how you present yourself. Don't play on your phone or stare at another screen.

Christian: didn't have to do an interview, applied during covid. Can do mock interviews with McNair Scholars that work up to actual interviews.

Jeff: still doing virtual interviews. Doesn't know if face to face interviews will ever come back. If you get an interview, you're in, you are trying to find a match. Don't be a jerk.

Who's going to be productive and a good team member?

Shannon: you're always on!! Grad students at social events try tryna evaluate if ur a good

fit for a lab or not. Always be your awesome self and professional. Review their research to ask informed questions. Always have questions to ask! That shows to them that you're interested in coming to their program.

10. How do you draft a personal essay for each individual school/faculty member?

Dr. Shannon: “goal statement”, fairly short essay on why you got interested in the field you're in. Who specifically do you wanna work with? State goals for why you're getting your degree. If you experience a mental block you're not alone! Start writing, even if you revise it all later. Don't procrastinate! Have people read it over, especially faculty!

Dr. J: Very important document. Has had to read 350x7 personal statements and has read really awful and really awesome ones. Be about you and what drives you. Don't duplicate what's on your transcript. If you have a narrative for your academic history, include that and write it well. Take it to your English professor (secretaries note: or writing lab in the library ;))!! Build the narrative for why you'd be a good fit for the lab. NEVER put anything about your mental health in a personal letter!!!

Christina: leave out any personal mental health bits.

Christian: had his proof read a lot. Stressful for him. It will never be perfect, but you wanna get it as close to that as you can and have as many people to read it as you can.

11. What if you take a gap year in between undergrad and graduate school? Will it affect a student's ability to get into grad school (ie does it look bad)?

- a. What are some things students can do during a gap year to prepare for grad school or bolster their application?

Jeff: depends on mentor/committee. Some people prefer people straight out of undergrad (jeff does), some will want a gap year. Be active in the field in a gap year. Volunteer somewhere, be in a lab, etc. even if mcdonalds pays more, you should try to get more experience in the field!

Christina: took 2 years off because she wasn't confident in the research exp. got hired as a research assistant and made good connections, beefed up cv, got more publications

Christian: took a semester off but wished he took a year. Work on cv and resume. Use skills from the undergrad program.

Shannon: agrees

12. How does financial aid affect grad school?

Christian: there's a limit to how much they disperse to you. Seems like it is similar to undergrad, but the limit is much lower.

13. How do grad assistance ships affect loans?

Christian: money made at the lab is put towards stuff but money made towards GA goes towards tuition and car stuff. Reach out with questions! It'll pay off

14. How can students get in touch with financial aid resources?

Jeff: students are not admitted if they don't have a stipend or way to pay for school.

Shannon: most PhD programs get tuition covered and a stipend if a graduate assistantship

15. What personally motivated you to go to grad school?

Shannon: knew that she wanted to be a clinical psychologist and needed the training for her job

Jeff: ditto

Christian: didn't have to get his MPH, but pandemic emphasized importance of going in order to be a better professional

16. Can you get your letters of rec now even if you know you'll take a gap year?

Shannon: Yes, for sure! You're fresh in their mind. Some schools will require letters be no more than 2 years old, but u can update them if needed

17. If you're interested in grad school and smth else, buit decide to do the other opp, does that affect your chance to go back?

Shannon: no! Most programs will proly applaud you for getting the experience.

Christian: agrees

18. Is there more value in having a letter of rec be sent privately?

Jeff: yes! Ask for a letter well in advance of applying. Every faculty member has a folder on their comp called "letters' ", so it will be ready to go in advance, but can be submitted only when you ask.

Shannon: Most schools have everything online. Include email from the writer of the letter so they can send it to you. Waive your right to see the letter bc ur confident that it'll be good!

Christian: waive the right to view it bc i'm confident in my letter writers.

19. Say you apply in 2 different rounds of grad school. Would you be able to use the same letters of recommendation for more than one cycle?

Shannon: You will have to resubmit it, but you can definitely include it again.

Jeff: if u have anything you wanna change in the letter, ask your letter writer

22. If you apply to 10-15 programs, do you need 10-15 personal statements?

Shannon: have one, but change a para for each one that tailors to the school. Make sure you send the right one to the right school!!!!

Jeff: if you get and spell the name of the mentor wrong, you'll be deleted. Be very careful. Don't use any track changes or comments!!

20. **(Final question)** What is the number one piece of advice you would give to students beginning the application process?

Shannon: don't be too shy to talk to people! Ask for their advice and help. Use your resources. You belong there!

Jeff: find a faculty mentor or grad mentor for the application process! It can be very helpful

Christian: don't doubt yourself or count yourself out! No programs are too good for you. Be confident to apply.

If you're doing McNair and applying for grad school, check with schools because they might waive application fees!