FAQs: Applying to join the Fox Lab as a PhD student*

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*Note: With her permission, this document was based heavily off of Dr. Jessica Schleider's document found here.

Will you be accepting a new PhD student to begin in Fall 2021?

I will be reviewing applications for the fall 2021 cycle!!

Should I apply to work in your lab?

Applying to graduate school is scary, time consuming, and expensive. It's important to make sure that you're putting your resources where they'll count the most!

I recommend that students who have shared interests, strong research and/or related experiences, and research-relevant long-term goals apply to work in my lab. Each of these are described in more detail below. If your interests, experiences, and goals are not aligned with these, I recommend that you save your resources/time for another application.

Interests
I am interested in working with students whose research interests overlap (at least partially!) with mine. This could mean that you're broadly interested in better understanding suicidal thoughts and behaviors, nonsuicidal self-injury, eating pathology, LGBTQ+ and intersectional mental health, impacts of racial bias on mental health care, and/or that you're interested in leveraging experimental and other novel methods to study mental health topics.

You do not have to be interested in ALL of these things, but I'm most interested in working with students who share at least some of these interests (ideally this includes an interest in studying self-injurious behaviors). Students who share these interests will be much happier working with me, too!

Experiences
PhD programs are long, and they involve a lot of time, energy, and research. I'm most interested in working with students who already have some research experience because this helps to ensure that they have had a chance to make sure that they want, and have an idea of what it means, to pursue a research-heavy degree.

I strongly prioritize applicants who have at least some research experience related to psychology (preferably clinical psychology).

I will typically prioritize applicants who have demonstrated research experience in areas overlapping with those listed above, but this is NOT required. The strongest research teams include people with a range of experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives.

If you don't have research experience in areas overlapping with those listed above, it'll be important that you highlight your research interestin at least two of those topics in a clear and compelling way. It will also be important that you highlight skills you've gained that are relevant to this research (see "What should I include on my CV" below for more on this).

Long-term goals
As a mentor, I feel best-prepared and most excited to work with students who are interested in **careers that involve clinically relevant research**. This does NOT mean that your goal has to be to become a faculty member at a research institution! In fact, you don't even have to know what your exact career goals are yet, as long as clinically relevant research is part of your vision.

Other areas of priority
I am committed to increasing the representation of graduate students from diverse and underrepresented backgrounds into clinical science settings. **I very much encourage people from underrepresented and historically marginalized/disadvantaged group to apply.**

How much do you weigh GRE/GPA?

Due to COVID-19, the University of Denver has made the GRE OPTIONAL for this upcoming cycle. You can submit your GRE score if you want to, but this is 100% your decision. I will not negatively evaluate your application if you do NOT include your GRE score.

I will do my best to consider ALL parts your application, without excessively weighting any one component. While a stellar GPA alongside an otherwise strong application may help a candidate to stand out, a strong GPA on its own is not sufficient, and a low GPA is not exclusionary.

So many factors can impact GPA, and **I do not have a minimum GPA requirement**. That said, if you earned low grades (C or below) in courses related to statistics and psychology, I ask that you and/or your recommenders discuss the context around these grades. It'd also be great for you/a recommender to describe how you've taken time to increase your knowledge/skill in statistics and/or psychology-related content to show that you're prepared to take higher level statistics and psychology courses as part of the graduate program.

What could help me to stand out as a candidate?

I expect all lab members to be committed to inclusivity, anti-racism, anti-transphobia, and anti-homophobia efforts. In addition to the personal statement, DU's required diversity statement is a place where you can describe these commitments.

Although not required, I am most interested in students who demonstrate some of the following:
- Experience with experimental methods applied to clinical psychology topics
- Strong statistical skills
- Strong coding skills
- Mentorship experience
- Interpersonal skills
- Experience working with people struggling with mental health difficulties
- Passion for reducing rates of suicide/self-harm
- Dog loving [*JK. I will not actually evaluate your application based on this, but I do love dogs a lot, and it certainly doesn't hurt if you love dogs/animals too.*]

I do not expect any one candidate to demonstrate each of these!

Should I email you to express my interest in applying to your lab?

Unless you have a specific set of questions that will impact your decision to apply to work with me at DU, I prefer that you do NOT email me to express interest in applying to work in my lab. Instead, prospective students are encouraged to review our recent publications and our lab website to learn more about our current research directions and our research team. At the interview stage, you'll have a lot of opportunities to ask questions!!

What should I include in my personal statement?

Personal statements are incredibly intimidating! It's hard to figure out what to include and how to frame your interests and experiences in a way that will help your application stand out.

Rather than spinning your wheels and thinking that you have to figure this out on your own, I HIGHLY recommend that you start by reading Mitch Prinstein's guide, which includes fantastic advice for writing a personal statement, and that you review real examples of personal statements (including my own!) curated by Jessica Schleider and Craig Rodriguez-Seijas (found here). Your personal statement does not have to (and shouldn't!!) look exactly like any of these examples, but I am hopeful that they'll help you think through what you want to showcase about yourself and that they'll provide some templates for doing so.

When I review personal statements, I'm typically impressed by statements that include the following (in no particular order):

1. Your research interests, and ideally a few specific research questions you're interested in testing during graduate school
2. A clear statement of why you're interested in DU and our lab in particular
3. A statement about your career goals *(at least on a broad level!)*
4. Your research/related experiences to-date, with a particular focus on independent research experience (if you have it) and/or on research and mentorship skills you've developed and how you'll apply those to your future research questions **and** our lab team

In addition to above, I want your personal statement to tell me something about you. There are many ways to do this, and there is no one right way! This can involve highlighting your passion for research, clinical topics, social justice, and/or personal/familial experience that led you to your current goals/interests/perspectives.

I am interested in becoming a therapist and/or incorporating clinical practice into my future career. I've heard that mentioning this in my application will hurt my admissions chances. Is this true?

As mentioned above, I am most interested in students who plan to pursue a career that involves at least some clinical research. I am passionate about clinical research, and I want to help foster that passion in my students. If you're not interested in pursuing research as even a part of your career, I do not think that my lab will be the right fit for you.

That said, **clinical psychology includes clinical practice!!!!** It is important that you also have interests in clinical practice if you choose to pursue a PhD in clinical psychology, as you'll be spending hundreds of hours working in clinical settings. Additionally, I truly believe that clinical practice informs research, and vice versa. Clinical skills are also very relevant to several key aspects of our lab's research.

What is your mentorship style/what expectations do you have for PhD students?

Mentorship style: As a new faculty member, my mentorship style is morphing and changing over time. Below, I outline key aspects of my mentorship/director style that I do not plan to change any time soon.

As a lab director, my primary goal is to make our lab a community. I truly believe that the best science emerges from teams of people with diverse perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences. I am committed to fostering a safe and inclusive climate in the lab to help promote the best possible science.

As a graduate mentor, I see my role as scaffolding graduate student growth across domains (e.g., academic, professional, research, personal domains). I do my best to provide the tools for all students to become strong researchers who understand and contribute to the research that our lab is conducting and to help them to become strong clinical scientists. I try to tailor opportunities, tasks, and experiences to individual graduate students to help them reach their longer-term goals. I also strive to be responsive, to provide constructive feedback, and to be an advocate for students who work with me.

Detailed information on my approach to mentoring and expectations for trainees is available in our Lab Manual (COMING SOON). I also recommend that you talk to my current and former students. To protect their time, I ask that you wait until the interview stage to do so, at which point I will put you in touch with those students.

What should I include on my CV?

When reviewing CVs, I'm looking to evaluate your research and clinical experiences to-date, and your research and clinically relevant experiences. I'm particularly looking for skills you've gained, independent projects you've run, and/or mentoring experiences that you've gathered that you can apply to your graduate research.

If you have less research experience, that can be OK, too! Adding additional and related experiences you've gained related our lab's research (e.g., work on a suicide hotline, in a clinical setting, work with adolescents), related to data management and analysis (consider highlighting statistical software you're familiar with!), related to project management, and related to mentorship will help to strengthen your application.

For tips on writing a CV, see
    "How to Write a Strong CV," Association of Psychological Science
    Example CV for clinical psychology applicants, University of Nebraska—Lincoln
    The Curriculum Vita: A Student's Guide to Preparation, Psi Chi

Do I have to have posters and/or publications to be considered for your lab?

This is a fantastic question. On the one hand, I tend to prioritize applicants who have at least one poster/publication, as these kinds of products provide evidence of independent research experience. As mentioned above, that helps me to determine that you're serious about research, and you are ready to jump into a very research heavy program, where these kinds of outputs will be required. On the other hand, opportunities to be on posters and publications are often NOT merit-based, and instead differ based on other factors that tend to correspond with privilege.

I will still seriously consider applicants who do not have posters and/or publications. If you're an applicant without those products on your CV, please spend time in your application describing other skills and experiences that help you to stand out as an applicant, and that you will leverage when working on these kinds of products during graduate school. In particular, plan to highlight skills around research idea generation/execution, statistics, coding, and writing.

Where can I learn more about the clinical psychology program at DU and where can I apply?

Learn more and apply here. Applications are due December 2nd.

Is it possible to waive the graduate student application fee?

Applications cost $65. The Graduate Admission's Office waives application fees for McNair Scholars, alum, veterans, and peace corp students. Students can indicate if any of these are applicable to them on their application.

Unfortunately, there are not currently other avenues directly through DU to receive application fee waivers (however, in most cases I recommend that you email programs and ask them about fee waivers!).

I know that applying to graduate school is expensive, and that these expenses can be unfairly prohibitive for many students. Please check out these additional fantastic resources (partly discovered due to the work of Dr. Sa-kiera Hudson and Shirley Wang) to help with at least some of your application costs:

1. FreeApp
2. Institute for Recruitment of Teachers
3. Check out this fantastic blog to find out more about GRE fee reductions, other application fee waivers, ways to make money while gaining research experience, and more.

Where else can I find information and guidance for my application process?

I recommend the following resources:

1. Mitch's Uncensored Advice for Applying to Graduate School in Clinical Psychology, provided by Dr. Mitch Prinstein, UNC Chapel Hill. A staple for those considering applying to graduate school in clinical psychology, from determining your best-fit career path to deciding between offers from Clinical PhD programs!
2. Getting Into Psych Grad School, provided by the Council of University Directors in Clinical Psychology. Fantastic guide from Directors of Clinical Training at Clinical Psychology PhD programs across the country.
3. Open Access Tips/Materials for Clinical Psych PhD Applicants, provided by Mallory Dobias, B.S. A collection of open-access pointers, timelines, and materials—from sample e-mails to prospective advisors to 'before' and 'after' personal statements.
4. So You Want to Go to Clinical Psych Grad School? ...Or Something? Slides from a lecture Dr. Jessica Schleider made for Stony Brook undergraduates on considering careers in clinical psychology and allied disciplines. Includes info about different career options and degrees; preparing to apply for PhD programs; and how to obtain research and clinical experience.