**PSY 201 - The Psychology Major: Academic and Professional Issues**

**Module 7: Getting into Grad School: GRE and Personal Statement**

**Study Guide Notes**

**Reading:**

Kuther: CH 9 and 10

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module 7 Objectives:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kuther Chapter 9:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You will learn:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What you can do with a Masters degree in psychology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Four pragmatic reasons for getting your Masters degree in psychology or related fields.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The difference between various masters degrees in psychology and related fields (e.g. masters in social work vs. masters in counseling).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How much you can expect to earn with your Masters in various occupations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Four reasons for getting a Doctoral degree and the types of degrees and doctoral programs that exist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The difference between a PhD, PsyD, and an EdD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The obstacles facing PhD clinicians.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Kuther Chapter 10:** |
| You will learn: |
| • Six questions to consider when deciding if you should go to grad school. |
| • Three keys to graduate school admission success. |
| • Questions to consider when choosing a program to apply to. |
| • Difference between clinical and counseling psychology programs. |
| • Seven things to look for when evaluating graduate programs. |
| • What grad schools look for: (a) Four very important things and (b) Seven generally important things. |
| • Three important things to notice when examining the Timeline for Applying to Grad School (e.g. when you should take the GRE). |
| • Characteristics of the person you should ask to write letters of recommendation. |
| • Four ways to help your referees in the letter writing process (and six things to include in a file of your background info to give to them). |
| • What the GRE is, its subtests, and tips for taking the GRE. |
| • What a curriculum vitae is, how it is different from a resume, and what components it should include. |
| • Grad school interviewing tips (common interview questions). |
Kuther Chapter 9: 
What can I do with a Graduate Degree in Psychology?

Graduate Level Careers in Psychology:
• Two categories:
  1. Master’s level degrees
  2. Doctoral level degrees (e.g. PhD, PsyD, EdD)

• Three types of Careers:
  1. Teaching
  2. Research Careers
  3. Applied Careers

What can you do with a Master’s Degree in Psychology?
• Depending on the program and curriculum, those with Master’s degrees can...
  1. Teach psychology in high school (other certification may be needed)
  2. Become more competitive for jobs in government and industry
  3. Practice clinical counseling or school psychology under supervision
  4. Obtain licensure for school psychology (depending on the state)
  5. Practice industrial/organizational psychology
  6. Pursue alternative careers in counseling (i.e. marriage and family therapy, alcohol and substance abuse counseling, and social work)

Pragmatic reasons for seeking a Master’s Degree:
1. Masters Programs generally have lower admission requirements (easier to get into than doctoral programs)
   – Doctoral Program Requirements = GPA of 3.2 and GRE of 1200
   – Master Program Requirements = often have lower requirements

2. More likely to offer part-time study
   – unlike doctoral programs, which are mostly full-time

3. Often allow enrollment in the Fall and Spring
   – unlike doctoral programs, which only allow Fall enrollment

4. Growing trend to hire masters instead of pricier doctoral candidates
Master’s Degrees in Psychology:

1. **Clinical and Counseling Psychology:**
   - **Job Description:**
     • Conducts assessments and therapies on individuals with psychological problems
   - **Work Setting:**
     • Mental health centers
     • Psychiatric hospitals
     • Nonprofit organizations
     • Group practices
   - **Starting Salary = 33,000**

   Most can’t practice independently (must be under direction of Doctoral-level Psychologist), so research the graduate program to make sure they meet the requirements for licensure!

2. **School Psychology:**
   - **Job Description:**
     • Assess student learning aptitudes, diagnose learning disabilities, identify and address specific needs, assess and promote personality, emotional, cognitive, and social development, and recommend appropriate interventions or classroom placements
   - **Work Setting:**
     • Elementary
     • Secondary schools
   - **Starting Salary = 41,000**

   Although some practice with just a master’s degree, National Certification as a School Psychologist requires a more advanced specialist’s degree (between a master and a doctoral, taking up to 1 year of extra study)

3. **Industrial / Organization Psychology:**
   - **Job Description:**
     • Apply psychological principles and research methods in the workplace.
     • Interviewing and assessing potential employees, employee development, etc.
   - **Work Setting:**
     • Business, government, private organizations as human resource specialists, directors, and managers
   - **Average Salary = 60,000**

4. **Research-oriented areas of Psychology: Quantitative, Developmental, General, or Cognitive Psychology**
   - **Job Description:**
     • Conduct psychological research
   - **Work Setting:**
     • University research centers, government, business, and private organizations
   - **Starting Salary = 36,000**

   Others use this degree to seek entrance in doctoral level programs
Master’s Degrees in Related Fields:

1. Social Work (MSW):
   - Education:
     • 2 of 3 years of study and internship (900 hours for licensure)
   - Job description:
     • Can practice therapy independently (in most states)
   - Work Setting:
     • Schools, government, nursing facilities, hospitals, outpatient treatment centers
   - Average Salary = 30,000 - 45,000

2. Counseling:
   - Education:
     • 2 years course work and 600 hours of supervised clinical experience
   - Job description:
     • Can conduct therapy independently and seek licensure or certification
   - Work Setting:
     • Government, schools, colleges and universities, private practice
   - Average Salary = 27,000 to 50,000

Main difference between Masters in Social Work vs. Counseling = Social work examines the global influences including the social and economic influences, whereas Counseling focuses more on forces within the individual.

3. Occupational Therapy:
   - Job Description:
     • Work with clients who experience disabilities (emotional, physical, mental) that influence their occupational performance or well-being.
     • Must obtain licensure.
   - Work Settings:
     • Hospitals, offices, and clinics
   - Average Salary = 45,000 - 55,000

4. Speech Pathology:
   - Job Description:
     • Assess, diagnose, and treat communication disabilities such as stuttering and impaired language.
   - Work Settings:
     • Schools, nursing homes, mental health centers, and medical settings
   - Average Salary = 45,000 - 55,000

Doctoral Degrees:

• Highest academic degree attainable

• Why get a doctoral degree?
1. Teach full-time at the college level.
2. Conduct research in a university, private industry or business (write scholarly journals or books).
3. Practice clinical psychology without supervision.
4. Engage in a variety of consulting positions that allow autonomy.

**Doctor of Philosophy (PhD):**
- Many different programs including;
  - (1) **Clinical**
  - (2) **Experimental** (Cognitive, Neuroscience, Developmental)
  - (3) **Human Factors**
  - (4) **Industrial / Organizational**
- 5 to 7 years of graduate work
- Research degree involving extensive training in research methods and statistics
- Culminates in a dissertation based on original research
- Most become professors or work in business, but PhDs in clinical psychology can also practice therapy

**Doctor of Psychology (PsyD):**
- *For* those who plan to engage in clinical practice rather than research / teach at university level
- ONLY Offered in clinical and counseling psychology
- Less emphasis on research -
  - Prepares graduates to become consumers instead of producers of research
- Education consists of practical and applied work, and examinations
- Dissertation is usually a theoretical paper

**Doctor of Education (EdD):**
- Not as popular as PhD or PsyD
- Offered in the education department
- Research requirements are not as vigorous as those for PhD programs
- Usually offers less training in psychology

**The Obstacles Facing Doctoral Clinicians:**
- Steady increase in the number of clinicians - so more competition for jobs
- Changes in managed health care...
  - Supports brief therapy, which contrasts with the long-term therapy approach of psychologists
  - Pushes for cheaper masters level candidates, instead of pricier doctoral candidates
**Kuther Chapter 10: Applying to Graduate School in Psychology**

**Should you go to Grad School?**
1. What kind of career do you want?
   - Is it really necessary to go to grad school to obtain that career?
   - Are there alternative ways to achieve it?
2. What are your reasons?
   - Prestige shouldn’t be the only reason
3. Are you ready for the HEAVY academic demands?
   - Do you have motivation to complete 2 + years of grad school?
   - Do you enjoy reading, writing, and analyzing info?
   - No last minute paper writing or skipping class!
4. Do you have the necessary academic achievements?
   - Most require high GPA and GRE scores
5. Are you ready for more methodology and statistics courses?
6. Are you ready for the emotional and financial costs?

**Keys to Graduate School Admission Success:**
- **1. Preparation**
  - Invest time needed to prepare applications adequately (you will need many, many hours)
  - Apply to those that you want to attend and where you have a reasonable chance of being accepted
- **2. Application know-how**
  - Understand the application process, what the application committees are looking for, and what should be included in the application.
- **3. Patience**
  - Admission process is lengthy - takes months to receive word.
  - Begin your plans to research programs and apply early in your undergraduate career.

**Choosing Graduate Programs:**
- **PhD vs. PsyD?**
  - **PhD** offers more flexibility in career options because of its research emphasis
    - Clinical PhDs can teach/research in academic setting and/or practice therapy.
    - Clinical PsyDs can only practice therapy.
  - **PhD** programs are usually less expensive, but take longer to complete.
- If you want to teach/research - what PhD programs of study interest you?
  Remember that some PhD programs (e.g. clinical and IO) are more difficult to get into than others
- Grad school entails specializing in a particular area of psychology...
  - Clinical
  - Industrial - Organizational
  - Developmental
Module 7: Grad School: GRE and Personal Statement

- Neuroscience
- Cognitive (Memory, Perception, Judgment, Decision-making)

- If you like therapy, should you go into Clinical or Counseling?
  - Counseling psychologists =
    - Help people solve personal problems (marital problems, etc.)
  - Clinical psychologists =
    - Help people solve personal problems and
    - Help diagnose and treat individuals with mental disorders.
    - Clinical programs are generally more difficult to get into

- Gather Program Information
  - Check out the book *Graduate Studies in Social Science and Work*
  - Or the *APA Guide to Graduate Study in Psychology*
    - Lists the criteria for admission, including GPA and GRE for all programs in US and Canada

- Evaluate the Programs:
  - Look for programs where...
    1. Your achievements match their admission criteria.
    2. Faculty work closely with students.
    3. If a PhD program = Faculty regularly publish in their area, publish with students, and attend conferences.
    4. Program is accredited by the APA (especially if clinical, counseling, or school psychology).
    5. Attrition rate is low and average time to complete is NOT above 7 years for doctoral programs.
    6. Adequate resources available (computer labs, libraries, etc.).
    7. There is financial support in the form of teaching or research assistantships.

- IMPORTANT!!
  - Many programs are *apprenticeship-like* (work closely with a faculty who will guide your learning experience)
Look For Programs
Where A Particular Faculty Member’s Interests Match Your Own

Read about their research program and teaching interests!
Read their published research!

What do Graduate Programs want?

VERY IMPORTANT:
1. Fit or match between applicant and program.
2. Research experience (especially one that resulted in a publication or presentation at conference).
3. Clarity, focus, and content of the admission essay (personal statement).
4. Interest expressed by Faculty Member of the Selection Committee to work with an Applicant!!!
   - So mention an interest to work with a particular faculty member and reasons why in your personal statement.

GENERALLY IMPORTANT:
1. Research assistant experience
2. Writing skills
3. Knowledge about and interest in the program
4. Statistics, research methodology, and hard science courses
5. Prestige of those faculty writing letters of recommendation
6. Potential for success as judged by interviewer
7. Honors and merit scholarships

Timeline for Applying to Grad School:
• Examine time line for applying to grad school in Kuther text
• Important things to notice...
  1. Start getting research and practical experience, and take the GRE by end of your junior year!
  2. Start evaluating grad programs before your senior year, and
  3. Early in your senior year, ask professors if they can write your letters of recommendation!

Letters of Recommendation:
• Letters of recommendation are very important!
• The person you should ask should...
  – Know you well/long enough to write with authority
  – Have a high opinion of you
  – Be able to compare you favorably to your peers
  – Be able to write a good letter
  – Know your work and describe your work positively
  – Know where you are applying
  – Know your education and career goals
  – Be well known
• Help your Referees!!
  1. Make an appointment with them early in your senior year or sooner.
  2. Ask early and give plenty of time to write (3 - 4 weeks minimum).
3. Provide them with info about the programs you are applying to
   – so they know what they are recommending you for!!

4. Provide referees a file with your background info:
   • Resume or vitae that includes GRE scores, research and applied experience, honor society memberships, awards won, and work experiences.
   • Courses you’ve taken with them and grades earned.
   • Professional goals.
   • DUE DATE for APPLICATION!!
   • Copies of application recommendation forms.
   • If program wants letters sent directly to the grad schools, provide addressed, stamped envelopes.

Confidential letters carry more weight,
(So waive your right to view your letters!!)

The Graduate Record Exam: GRE General Test
• GRE website http://www.gre.org
• GRE = aptitude test that measures verbal, quantitative, and analytic skills.
• Administered by computer year-round (takes 2.5 hours)
• How is it scored?
   – Verbal and quantitative
     • 200 - 800 points for each subtest, so highest score is 1600.
   – Some schools also look at the analytic section which ranges from 0 to 6 points.

GRE: Verbal Subtest
• 30 multiple-choice questions to be answered in 30 minutes
• Requires good vocabulary so start expanding your vocab today!!
• Four types of questions:
  1. Analogies
  2. Antonyms
  3. Reading comprehension
  4. Sentence completion

GRE: Quantitative Subtest
• Two sections - each with 28 multiple-choice questions to be completed in 45 minutes.
• Calculators NOT PERMITTED!!
• Must use scratch paper and pencil!
• Requires math skills up to algebra and geometry
• Three types of questions:
  1. Problem-solving (word problems)
  2. Quantitative comparison
  3. Data analysis
     • Interpret tables and graphs
     • Use of Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation)
     • Knowledge of elementary probability

GRE: Analytic Writing Section
• 2 subsections:
  1. Present your perspective on an Issue
     • 45 minutes task
     • Presented an issue and asked to construct reasons and provide ample support for your view.
  2. Analyze an argument
     • 30-minute task
     • Critique the argument, assess its claims, and conclude whether or not it is reasoned.

GRE Preparation Tips:
1. Know the test.
2. Understand the directions beforehand.
3. Download and use the free GRE PowerPrep software: Test Preparation located on the GRE website.
4. Download sample GRE tests.
5. Buy a GRE review book with computer practice tests and practice taking a full, timed version of the test.

GRE Psychology Test:
• About 1/2 of doctoral programs require the GRE Psychology subtest
• Consists of approximately 215 questions from core psychology courses
  – 40% from learning, memory, language, thinking, perception, sensation, physiological psychology
  – 43% from social, clinical, abnormal, developmental, and personality
  – 17% from history of psychology, applied, research methodology and statistics
• Administered only by paper and pencil - 3x’s a year (April, November, and December)
• Study upper level psychology books such as...
  – Psychology
    • by A.J. Fridlund, D. Reisberg, and H. Gleitman
  – Psychology: In Search of the Human Mind
    • by R.J. Sternberg

Curriculum Vitae (CV):
• Some programs require a CV instead of/or in addition to a resume...Be aware of the application requirements.
• How is a CV different from a resume?
  – CV is a longer (at least two pages).
  – CV is a more detailed synopsis of your educational and academic backgrounds, including
    • Teaching and research experience,
    • Publications and presentations,
    • Awards and honors,
    • Affiliations, and other details
CV Components and Layout:

- **CONTACT INFORMATION**
  - Name, Address, Telephone, Cell Phone, Email
- **EDUCATION**
  - Degree type, majors, date of graduation, university, training and certification
- **RESEARCH EXPERIENCE**
  - List in chronological order, include position details and dates
- **PUBLICATIONS OR CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS**
- **EMPLOYMENT HISTORY**
  - Relevant Work Experience - List in chronological order, include position details and dates
- **APPLIED PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE**
  - Internships, etc.
- **PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS**
  - Certifications and Accreditations
  - Computer Skills (including Data Analysis Software)
  - Research, Statistical, and Data Analysis Skills
- **RELEVANT COURSES**
  - Include list of...
    - Relevant courses (and grades earned) to the specific program
      - For example - if applying to a Developmental Psy Program, then list Developmental courses such as Child Development or Life Span Development, or Aging
    - Any research or statistic courses
- **HONORS, AWARDS, SCHOLARSHIPS**
- **PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS and LEADERSHIP POSITIONS**
  - Psi Chi, Psychology Club, etc.
- **INTERESTS**
- **FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

Acing the Interview:

- Some programs conduct interviews...
- Before the interview, learn as much about the program as possible
  - Review program description, department website, and faculty web sites, and research interests.
- PRACTICE answers to the following common questions...
  - Why are you interested in the program?
  - What do you know about the program?
  - What are your career goals?
  - Why did you choose a career in psy?
  - What are your research interests?
  - What are your academic strengths?
  - What do you like best about yourself?
  - Who would you like to work with and why?
  - Describe the accomplishments you are most proud of?
  - If you were to begin a research project now what would the topic be?
  - Discuss your clinical experiences?
  - What are your strengths and weakness?
  - Tell me about yourself.