

Society for the Teaching of Psychology (APA Division 2)  
**OFFICE OF TEACHING RESOURCES IN PSYCHOLOGY (OTRP)**  
Department of Psychology, Georgia Southern University, P. O. Box 8041,  
Statesboro, GA 30460

***WHAT DEPARTMENTS AND FACULTY CAN DO TO ASSIST  
THEIR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS WITH GRADUATE SCHOOL  
PLANNING***

Written by Patricia Keith-Spiegel, Ball State University. Adapted with permission of the publisher from *The Complete Guide to Graduate School Admission: Psychology and Related Fields* (Lawrence Erlbaum Publishers, Hillsdale, NJ, 1990).

Undergraduate academic departments can provide many resources for their graduate-school bound students that may be difficult, even impossible, for some students to create for themselves. Fortunately, most of the resources are not expensive or even very time-consuming to collect and maintain, and one or more dedicated faculty members are typically willing to pitch in. Unfortunately, some students will fall through all the cracks regardless of how much effort is put into student awareness projects. But for those who are alert and motivated, these activities may greatly facilitate a successful outcome when planning for their futures.

1. Create a graduate school application materials file. This can be put together from catalogs and applications donated by your graduate school applicants who do not need them anymore. Items can be replaced as more recent versions are contributed. This resource requires a couple of file cabinets if the collection is extensive (i.e., materials from around 400 programs) and is easier to maintain intact by instituting some monitoring system. This resource also helps encourage students to consider programs in other geographical locales. Applying to school farther away from home base is often to the student's advantage in the selection process.

2. Create a small resource library that students can use, containing books such as a current copy of APA's Graduate Study in Psychology and Related Fields, relevant Peterson's and Educational Testing Service graduate program directories, the most recent APA and APS membership directories, and other helpful information, such as the current GRE information pamphlet from the Educational Testing Service, the MAT pamphlet from the Psychological Corporation, and articles about training models (clinical-scholar, scientist-practitioner, and professional-practitioner), and careers.

3. Encourage students to explore career opportunities before deciding on a graduate program. Students often think only "clinical psychology," yet do not fully understand the differences among training models that should play a major role in their graduate school decisions. Other careers that may be of great interest to students often remain unconsidered. University teaching, for example, is predicted to be opening up during the latter half of this decade. Consider developing seminars or courses on careers and/or career counseling.

4. Encourage faculty members to communicate clearly their requirements for writing letters of recommendation for students (e.g., if students should submit a résumé, statement of purpose, list of courses taken in their major and grades received, how much lead time is needed, etc.). This allows students their best opportunity to impress each referee, and also makes letter-writing tasks much easier for the referees.

5. Encourage faculty to get the letters they agree to write for students in on time. Recent data

indicate that reference letters are often late, and this lateness can jeopardize students' chances of acceptance because their files remain incomplete while the reviewing of complete files is already underway. Assure that support services are available to assist faculty with these tasks, at least during the "crunch" periods (December through February).

6. Encourage faculty to involve as many students as possible in their research projects and/or provide incentives for faculty to sponsor students for independent research. Data clearly show that a student with research experience, particularly if the student earns an authorship credit on a presentation, is greatly advantaged in the selection process regardless of the kind of program to which the student applies.

7. Sponsor an annual "how to get into graduate school" workshop for students. The best time for such a function is during the spring, when second semester juniors can learn what they can do over the summer to get a jump on the application process. The best alternative time is right at the beginning of the fall term when first-semester seniors will need to learn what they should be doing right away. Consider inviting faculty from nearby graduate programs to participate.

8. Develop an honors program in your department for the most promising students. Data show that participation in such programs is viewed favorably by selection committees.

9. Support your Psi Chi Chapter. Encourage faculty involvement, which directly affects the vitality of a chapter, and attendance at Psi Chi functions. Applicants who have been active in Psi Chi are rated more favorably than applicants who simply list their membership.

10. Encourage the faculty to watch for unusual opportunities for undergraduate students. These may include paid jobs or prestigious volunteer opportunities, calls for student journal referees, chances to meet colleagues from departments that might be of interest for graduate work, research competitions, and so on.

11. Create a bulletin board for displaying information of interest to aspiring graduate school students. Include the names and locations of on-campus resources that students may find valuable (e.g., career counseling, financial aid, placements). Encourage faculty and students to contribute items for posting.

12. Motivate students to attend professional meetings, especially those that traditionally offer considerable programming to meet students needs such as APA, APS, and the large regional associations. These meetings also often give students a clearer sense of professional identity. Post the information about such meetings.

13. Encourage faculty mentoring of promising students. These activities might include collaborative research or other projects, careful advising, fieldwork supervision, facilitating of other useful and valuable experiences that will enhance the application of outstanding students, and criterion-referenced letters of recommendation. Data overwhelmingly support the marked advantage during the selection process of the "mentored applicant."

14. Institute an awards program to honor those students who have attained high academic honors and/or made significant contributions to the department. If possible, bestow these awards just before or just after the winter break so that the recipients can list and describe their awards on their graduate school applications.

15. Make a list of faculty and their specialty and current research areas readily available to students as a way of facilitating monitoring and/or other project collaboration. (If your department is large, consider posting this information with photos of the faculty members to facilitate the students' opportunities to make connections.)

16. Encourage your students to participate in undergraduate research conferences (if there are any in your geographical area). If there is no such opportunity nearby, consider putting on your own annual departmental level research presentation. Data show that selection committees react favorably to any research experience, even if the forum was a modest one.

17. If your campus is very small and/or not well known, consider creating a short handout about your institution and department, indicating strengths and unusual features, suitable for inclusion in your student's graduate school application materials. Data show that applicants from better known colleges and universities usually have an up-front advantage. This edge at the undergraduate level may be as much from the institution's name recognition than anything else. With additional information, selection committees may soften any bias.

18. Assure that outstanding students are aware of the various financial resources that they can apply for independently, such as the National Science Foundation Fellowships. Keeping a file of recent copies of the applications of the larger funding sources for potential applicants to view readily is an ideal resource. In addition, posting a copy (in easy view) of the titles of funding guides and catalogs that are probably available in your college or university library or financial aid office is helpful.

19. Get the word out early (on bulletin boards or in class announcements) that graduate school planning is not something that should wait until the senior year. Students who begin an active plan in their junior year or earlier have many advantages.

20. If your department has a graduate program, assure that your undergraduates understand any policies regarding their applications to your graduate program. That is, are internal applicants viewed and treated any differently?

21. Generate, as soon after fall grades are submitted as possible, a graduating psychology class ranking by overall GPA. This way, students in the top 5% and top 10% of your psychology class can identify themselves. Recent data show that students who can indicate that they are in the top 5% of their own graduating class are viewed very favorably by selection committees.