

FAQs: Applying to Stony Brook University's Clinical Psychology PhD program

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Why did you make this document?

The clinical psychology PhD application process is an uneven playing field. Applicants without access to strong mentors, or without professional connections, may have less access to the information provided here. By sharing this FAQ document, we hope to help “level the playing field” across applicants to our program.

Please note that all responses in this document reflect the opinions of the faculty in our clinical psychology program only. They may not reflect the opinions of other Department faculty or Stony Brook University.

I have heard that Stony Brook's program follows a “clinical science” model. What does that mean?

The clinical science model is founded in two key principles: (1) A science-centered search for knowledge—meaning that our approach to the discovery of new knowledge is based in scientific principles; and (2) the true integration of science and practice—meaning that science and practice are not two separate worlds, they are one in the same. In clinical science training programs, science training for conducting research and for clinical practice are fully integrated and reciprocal. Research informs all aspects of clinical practice and clinical practice continuously informs research. Our program embodies these principles.

Importantly, our program's clinical science orientation is unrelated to our approach to evaluating application materials from prospective students. As noted in the sections below, we do not impose GPA cut-offs for admissions purposes. We [prioritize diversity](#) in our student body, which directly contributes to the strength of our Department.

What kinds of careers does Stony Brook's clinical program prepare its graduates to pursue?

In line with the clinical science model, and the values of the [Psychological Clinical Science Accreditation System, or PCSAS](#), we prepare our students for careers that emphasize the scientific generation of new knowledge (in the form of research engagement, publishing, presenting, etc.) and the widespread dissemination of such knowledge (in the form of teaching, mentoring, supervision, consultation, program and policy development, in settings within and beyond academia). Our students also are exceptionally well-trained in science-based clinical practice, and their careers often (and typically) include service provision. However, service provision, on its own, is not the typical career path that our program emphasizes.

Is Stony Brook's clinical psychology program accredited?

The Clinical Psychology program at Stony Brook University is committed to a clinical science model. We are currently accredited by both the APA CoA (Accredited, Inactive Status) and PCSAS.

Regarding current CoA accreditation, the program was most recently accredited in the spring of 2018, and, at the time, received full accreditation until 2028. After careful deliberation and discussion, the program faculty has come to the decision as a group that our approach to training is more consistent with the values of PCSAS, which was specifically designed to accredit clinical science programs, than of CoA, which accredits programs with a variety of training models spanning all of applied clinical psychology. **Hence, it is our intention to not seek accreditation by CoA after our current CoA accreditation expires in 2028. We will continue to maintain our PCSAS accreditation.**

Our program will remain committed to training students who are among the field's best clinical psychologists, fully prepared for positions at the forefront of clinical science and practice. We will remain committed to preparing students to be competitive for the best internships, postdoctoral positions, and career opportunities, and we will maintain our emphasis on training clinical scientists who approach psychological problems from an evidence-based perspective and who also are skilled clinicians. In addition, once our CoA accreditation lapses, all students graduating from our program will be eligible for licensure in NY and a growing number of other states (including California, Delaware, Illinois, Arizona, Missouri, Michigan, and New Mexico (with more pending), representing more than 37% of the total U.S. population). Further, PCSAS is affirmed and formally recognized as an independent accrediting body for practicing Clinical Psychologists by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Association of Psychology Postdoctoral and Internship Centers (APPIC), the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). More information is available on [the PCSAS website](#).

IMPORTANT! APPLICANTS FOR FALL 2022 ADMISSIONS AND BEYOND: If you are admitted to our program for Fall 2022 and choose to attend, you will graduate from a program that is accredited only by PCSAS. You will not graduate from an APA accredited program, nor will any subsequent entering classes.

When and how can I apply to your program, and what materials are required?

Applications to the PhD Program are accepted **September 15 through December 1st** for the following Fall.

Application Forms must be completed and submitted online through the Graduate School website: <https://graduateschool.stonybrook.edu/apply/>. After a quick registration, you can visit the site as often as you like, and also have the option to change your response and fill out the application over several sessions.

You will also need to submit a **Curriculum Vita (CV)**, a **personal statement**, **unofficial transcripts** (we will request official transcripts from admitted students), and **three letters of recommendation** from current/past professors or supervisors who can speak to your potential and accomplishments as a scientist, leader, and a future clinical psychologist. We provide additional suggestions for preparing your CV and personal statement in sections below.

Lastly, the **Application Fee** is \$100 for both domestic and international students, payable by credit card.

****NOTE:** Applicants who meet any of the following criteria are eligible for an application fee waiver through our graduate school:

- Applicants who re-apply for admission within one academic year of declining an official offer of admission.
- Students who are U.S. citizens and have current documentation from a financial aid administrator of an appropriate college or university official substantiating that they are currently enrolled and that the payment of the application would create a financial hardship (complete financial information for the current academic year must be provided, including total cost of education and amount and types of financial aid received). To qualify, applicants must request a waiver from the Graduate School Admissions Office before they submit their application for admission and should include the necessary documentation listed above.
- Current students who have a fellowship/scholarship through EOP, HEOP, SEEK, McNair, Project 1000, AGEP, CSTEP, LSAMP, and AMSNY. To qualify, applicants must have a letter or email from the appropriate agency sent to the Graduate School Admissions Office.
- Veterans of the United States Military Service, currently on Active Duty or members of the National Guard or Reserves are exempt from paying the graduate application fee. NOTE: Before fee waiver is applied, veterans must be vetted through the Office of Veteran Affairs at Stony Brook University.

Appropriate supporting documentation for the application fee waiver can be emailed to gradadmissions@stonybrook.edu (Graduate School) or spd@stonybrook.edu (School of Professional Development). Once the admissions office receives the appropriate documents, the fee will be waived for the applicant so they may submit their online application without paying. **Application fees cannot be refunded so do not submit and pay the fee if you are requesting a waiver.** Please allow 5 business days for the application fee to be waived.

Is the general and/or Psychology GRE required for admission?

Neither the GRE general test nor the Psychology subject test is required for application or admission to our program. **In fact, to ensure fairness in our application review process, we do not accept GRE scores as part of your application.** Even if you have taken these exams, please do not include your scores on your CV or supplementary materials.

Do you allow applicants to submit supplementary information to contextualize their application materials (e.g., to highlight pertinent aspects of your background, identity, or life experiences)?

We do not require applicants to submit supplementary materials of any kind. However, we do invite all applicants to share aspects of their personal identity or experiences that may help contextualize their application materials and accomplishments to date, if relevant. We invite this information in the following (optional) prompt, embedded in the Graduate School's application:

“The Psychology Department is committed to seeking qualified students from backgrounds, groups or classes which have been underrepresented in the profession. Often such applications require special interpretation. If you have such a background, or are a member of an underrepresented group, please share any relevant information in the space below.”

What should I include in my personal statement?

We find it helpful when applicants include several or all the following in their personal statements:

- (1) A clear statement of your general research interests, and how they relate to a particular faculty member's work or lab
- (2) A statement about your general career goals, and how they relate to the objectives of Stony Brook University's clinical psychology program.
- (3) Discussions of your independent research experience(s) and what you learned from them. In these discussions, We suggest emphasizing (1) the skills you developed from working on each project, and (2) what your “takeaways” were from the project—e.g., new research ideas or questions your work inspired.
- (4) Descriptions of significant leadership and/or service-related experiences that have shaped your interests and career goals. (Note that “leadership experiences” may occur in or outside the context of research training or university experiences!)
- (5) If relevant, a summary of how principles of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and/or life experiences, have shaped you as well as your research interests and career goals.

Lastly, as an added resource, [here are real examples of personal statements written for clinical psychology PhD programs](#) from current students, post-docs, and faculty from across the United States. (This list is maintained by Dr. Jessica Schleider, Northwestern University, and Dr. Craig Rodriguez-Seijas, University of Michigan. Note that these statements were written for a wide variety of PhD programs and may not follow our program-specific recommendations for personal statements, outlined above.)

I have never had to write a CV—just a regular resume. How should I organize this document?

Here is some guidance:

- [“How to Write a Strong CV,”](#) Association of Psychological Science
- [Example CV for clinical psychology applicants,](#) University of Nebraska—Lincoln

Which of your faculty will be reviewing applications for new PhD students (pending availability of funds)?

Please view each faculty member’s website for information (in alphabetical order by last name):

Dr. Kristin Bernard, [Developmental Stress and Prevention Lab](#)

Dr. Joanne Davila, [Relationship Development Center](#)

Dr. Nicholas Eaton, [Eaton Lab Group](#)

Dr. Daniel Klein, [Klein Developmental Psychopathology Lab](#)

Dr. Aprajita Mohanty, [Neuroscience of Emotion, Cognition, & Psychopathology Laboratory](#)

Dr. Brady Nelson, [Laboratory for Clinical and Affective Neuroscience](#)

How do I know if I am a “good fit” for a faculty member’s lab?

Several faculty members have written descriptions of the research foci of their labs and/or their definition of “goodness of fit” to their lab group. These descriptions are linked in the question above.

Should I email faculty members to express my interest in applying to their lab?

Although we welcome emails from prospective students, your decision to email faculty (or not) will have **no impact** on your odds of receiving an interview invitation or an offer of admission. Whether or not you contact us in advance, prospective students are encouraged to review each faculty member’s online materials, linked above. If you have specific questions that are not addressed on these pages, please get in touch, and the faculty will do their best to address them.

Is it advantageous to list multiple mentors of interest (or just one) on my application?

There is no inherent advantage to naming multiple mentors of interest on your application. We closely review all applications on which we are listed as a **first-choice mentor**. In many cases, successful applicants to any given lab do not list multiple mentors of interest. Listing multiple potential mentors may be appropriate if your interests and goals clearly bridge two faculty members’ research programs (as described in your personal statement)—and in rare cases, co-mentorship by two faculty members in the clinical area is possible. Applicants whose interests and goals primarily match one faculty member’s lab do not gain an advantage by listing other faculty mentors on their application.

My undergraduate GPA is below 3.5. Will this remove me from consideration?

No. Many factors can influence one's GPA, including competing commitments (e.g., working part-time while in school), family obligations, and health challenges. Academic achievement is very important, but context is, too. If you believe your GPA does not reflect your potential as a future scientist, please (1) ask one of your recommenders to share more about your circumstances to help us holistically assess your achievements, or (2) provide this information in your personal statement.

Are there any other 'screening criteria' you use to review applications?

No. You work hard on your application materials. The least we can do is read them!

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?

Our program aims to recruit students seeking rigorous training in both research *and* clinical practice. Both skill-sets inform each other necessarily and are fundamental to a clinical scientist training model. At the same time, Stony Brook's clinical psychology program has a very strong clinical science orientation, and students who are happiest in our program tend to want careers that incorporate research in some way.

In addition to 'traditional' research careers (e.g., faculty positions in universities or academic medical centers), some of our students have successfully pursued careers in mental health policy. As examples, program graduates have secured policy-related jobs at the National Institute of Mental Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Kaiser Permanente, among others, where they shape policies guiding national research priorities and clinical activities in large-scale health care networks. Some of our graduates have also entered clinical practice careers, where they conduct evidence-based treatment and assessment.

My own experiences with mental health problems (e.g., my own, a friend's, or a relative's) shaped my interest in pursuing a clinical psychology PhD. I've been told not to mention this in my personal statement. Is this true?

Life experiences shape our career interests, trajectories, and goals in meaningful ways. There is nothing wrong with acknowledging intersections between our "human" and "scientific" selves. In fact, [lived experience with psychopathology and/or mental health challenges has the potential to strengthen your work as a clinical scientist](#). However, personal/lived experiences of mental health challenges should not be the sole focus of your personal statement. Your research interests, experiences, goals, and "fit" to your prospective lab and program are most helpful when reviewing your application.

Will your interviews be held in-person this cycle?

Historically, Stony Brook University's clinical psychology Ph.D. program has conducted doctoral admissions interviews on-campus. We recognize that applicants, and many Ph.D. programs, greatly value features of the on-campus interview process. However, for reasons described below, the Stony Brook University Clinical Psychology faculty have decided to hold Ph.D. student interview days entirely remotely for the foreseeable future. Applicants residing locally will not be permitted to interview in-person. After receiving an offer, admitted applicants will have the option (but will not be required) to participate in an on-campus visit to aid their decision-making process.

During this time of unprecedented change, we are viewing the on-campus interview tradition through a more critical lens. For the coming admissions cycles, the ongoing pandemic may render travel unsafe or impossible for many applicants. More broadly, requiring (and, indeed, even offering) on-campus interviews creates profound financial barriers to pursuing graduate education. These barriers disproportionately affect BIPOC applicants and those from lower-income families, exacerbating inequities that our program is committed to fighting against.

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

We recommend the following resources:

- [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.*
- [Your Application Year,](#) a step-by-step guide for applying to Psychology PhD programs school provided by the Building Roads to Inclusion and Diversity in Graduate Education (BRIDGE) Psychology Network
- [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.*
- [So You Want to Go to Clinical Psych Grad School? ...Or Something?](#) Slides from a lecture that Dr. Jessica Schleider (former Stony Brook faculty member) made for Stony Brook undergraduates considering careers in clinical psychology and allied disciplines. This includes info about different career options and degrees; preparing to apply for PhD programs; and how to obtain research and clinical experience.