

Graduate School Advising Guide: School Psychology

School psychologists help children and youth succeed academically, socially, and emotionally. They collaborate with educators, parents, and other professionals to create safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments for all students that strengthen connections between home and school.

School psychologists are highly trained in both psychology and education. At a minimum, they must complete a three-year graduate program that includes a year-long internship and leads to the Specialist degree (other terms apply in some states). About a third of school psychologists earn doctorates but very few states require a doctorate to practice school psychology in schools. School psychologists must be certified and/or licensed by the state in which they work. They also may be nationally certified by the National School Psychology Certification Board. Employment prospects for school psychologists are excellent; shortages exist in many areas at this time. Further information about employment, licensure and certification is available at the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) web site, www.nasponline.org.

Graduate School Admissions

School psychology graduate programs typically include 60–72 hours of coursework in mental health, child development, school organization, learning theory, applied behavior analysis, counseling, research methods, assessment, and consultation. Most programs are full time.

Admission to school psychology graduate programs is competitive. At Winthrop, in recent years, 63 to 84 individuals have applied for just 10 openings. The average GPA for students admitted to Winthrop's program has been 3.5–3.6. Typically, the average combined GRE verbal and quantitative score has been 950–1040. Winthrop's faculty, however, emphasize that undergraduate GPA, experience with children, and diversity of background and experience are very important factors. An applicant's academic background (e.g., institution attended; strength of courses taken, research experience) is also considered. References can be important, especially if they are particularly positive or somewhat negative or neutral. For those individuals selected for interviews, the outcomes of the interview is very important.

Graduate programs vary with regard to prerequisite coursework. Winthrop's program is probably typical. It requires 15 hours in five areas: (1) general psychology; (2) human development (child development or child psychology may be acceptable alternatives); (3) experimental psychology or research methods; (4) psychological measurements (tests and measurements or educational measurements may be acceptable alternatives); and (5) statistics. However, some prerequisites may be completed after admission to the program. Most successful applicants have undergraduate degrees in psychology or education and have some relevant experience.

NASP-Approved Graduate Schools

A complete list of nationally approved graduate programs is available at www.nasponline.org. In South Carolina, the Citadel, Francis Marion, USC, and Winthrop offer nationally approved programs. In North Carolina, approved programs are: Appalachian State, East Carolina, NC State, UNC-Chapel Hill and Western Carolina University.

Additional Information

School psychologists work to find the best solution for each student and situation; they use different strategies to address student needs and to improve school and district-

wide support systems.

School psychologists work with students individually and in groups. They also develop programs to train teachers and parents about effective teaching and learning strategies, techniques to manage behavior at home and in the classroom, working with students with disabilities or with special talents, addressing abuse of drugs and other substances, and preventing and managing crises. In addition, most school psychologists provide the following services:

Consultation

- Collaborate with teachers, parents, and administrators to find effective solutions to learning and behavior problems.
- Help others understand child development and how it affects learning and behavior.
- Strengthen working relationships between teachers, parents, and service providers in the community.

Evaluation

- Evaluate eligibility for special services.
- Assess academic skills and aptitude for learning.
- Determine social-emotional development and mental health status.
- Evaluate learning environments.

Intervention

- Provide psychological counseling to help resolve interpersonal or family problems that interfere with school performance.
- Work directly with children and their families to help resolve problems in adjustment and learning.
- Provide training in social skills and anger management.
- Help families and schools manage crises such as death, illness, or community trauma.

Prevention

- Design programs for children at risk of failing at school.
- Promote tolerance, understanding, and appreciation of diversity within the school community.
- Develop programs to make schools safer and more effective learning environments.
- Collaborate with school staff and community agencies to provide services directed at improving psychological and physical health.
- Develop partnerships with parents and teachers to promote healthy school environments.

Research and Planning

- Evaluate the effectiveness of academic and behavior management programs.
- Identify and implement programs and strategies to improve schools.
- Use evidence-based research to develop and/or recommend effective interventions.

Note: information in this handout was adapted by Dr. Leigh Armistead from the Winthrop University School Psychology Program website and from National Association of School Psychologists publications.