

1

## Is There Life After a BA in Psych? Applying to Graduate School (or not)

Jim Clark  
Department of Psychology  
University of Winnipeg

2

### Preamble/Caveat

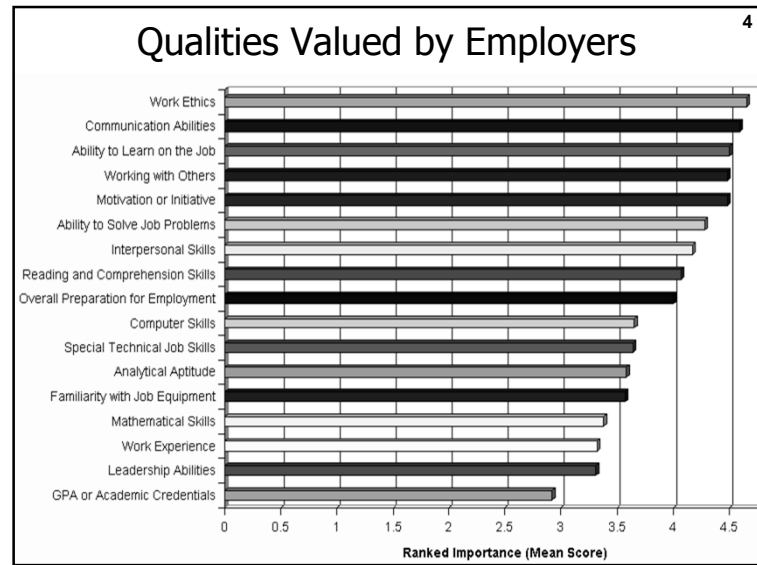
- The following material is based on my admittedly subjective sense about how to explore question of further education, and how to apply to graduate school. But there is no set formula for this process (or for most complex issues in life). You may get somewhat different advice from various people you consult (Faculty, other Students, Parents, ...), and it is ultimately up to you to decide what approach to take.

... Good luck! Jim

3

### 1. Is graduate school for me?

- Give serious attention to this question
  - Generate pros and cons. Think critically. Be honest.
  - Do I enjoy and do well at academic activities?: Seminars, Research, Teaching, Thinking, Writing, ...
  - Amount of time for graduate studies
  - Other psychology-related careers and other routes to what you ultimately want to do.
    - Human resources, Polling companies, Social Work, Counselling, Justice & Law, .... (possible jobs for Psychology Majors)
- Preparing for non-academic route
  - Skills portfolio: activities in university (e.g., computer skills, spoken presentations, writing, working hard, ...) (+1)
  - Interests: Strong Interest Inventory, ...
  - Letters of recommendation
  - Relevant academic knowledge: attitudes, cognitive, ...



## Harvard Business Review July-August 2013

5

54. **Connect, Then Lead** Most of us try to demonstrate competence above all in the workplace, but research suggests that the way to influence – and to lead – is to begin with warmth. *Amy J. C. Cuddy, Matthew Kohut, and John Neffinger*

76. **The Uses (and Abuses) of Influence** Persuasion works by appealing to certain deeply rooted human responses, and leaders who understand those responses and play to them in authentic ways can significantly elevate the probability of success. Social scientist *Robert Cialdini*, interviewed by *Sarah Cliffe*

**120 MANAGING YOURSELF**  
**Keep Up with Your Quants**  
Statistics may not be in your blood, but analytics-based decision making is in your future. You can learn how to do it well.  
*Thomas H. Davenport*

## Influence

How to Get It  
How to Use It

**24 DEFEND YOUR RESEARCH**  
**If You Want to Motivate Someone, Shut Up Already**  
A new study shows that strong, silent coaches are most effective.

102. **Your Brain at Work** Recent discoveries in neuroscience offer invaluable insights into the best ways to approach innovation, motivation, decision making, and other key management tasks. *Adam Waytz and Malia Mason*

## 2. Choose Area(s) of Psychology.

6

- What areas of psychology interest me?
- Clinical
  - Will I be competitive?
    - APA guide to Graduate programs (GPAs, GREs)
  - Specializations: Forensic, Child, ...
  - Integrate other areas with clinical
    - Overlapping areas: applied social, developmental, ...
    - Include applied components to prepare for "clinical" work?
- Non-clinical
  - More research emphasis, academic career?
- Keep in mind how you would "market" yourself after finished if academic didn't work out

## 3. Select schools (i.e., people).

7

- Most important decision often concerns the people you will study with
  - Identify specific topics and researchers within your general area
  - Talk to relevant faculty
  - Search PsycInfo for people in Canada (or not) who do the desired kind of work
    - Find their institutional affiliation
  - Browse Departments of Psychology (e.g., at CPA site) [CPA/SCP > CANADIAN UNIVERSITIES](#)
- Other issues
  - Geographic, Financial, Personal likes and dislikes, ...

## 4. Find more information

8

- National scholarships
  - NSERC, SSHRC, CIHR, ...
  - Grades, Letters (academic-related activities / competencies)
- Faculties of Graduate Studies at institutions you are considering
  - Often have additional information beyond that on the Department websites, especially concerning financial opportunities
  - [University of Manitoba: Faculty of Graduate Studies](#)


## 5. Make contact

9

- Graduate school involves "nominal" and "actual" selection process
  - Nominal: Forms, Committee, ...
  - Actual(?): Is someone willing to supervise you as a student?
- Consider sending e-mail inquiring whether person is accepting students in coming year
- Find other students (e.g., former UofW students) in department or perhaps even lab you are interested in

## 6. Write GREs

10

- Verbal, Quantitative, ... 
- Give yourself time to prepare if there are weaknesses in any of these areas
  - On-line resources: e.g., vocabulary
  - Practice: timing, strategies, ...
- Don't forget your psychology expertise!
  - Mnemonics and other learning strategies
  - Dealing with negative emotions (anxiety)
  - Programs for procrastination
- Choose courses during undergraduate years that will strengthen possible areas of weakness

## 7. Prepare formal submission materials

11

- Pay attention to both content and writing
  - Application is sample of your writing: how you say it may be more important than what you say
  - Prepare and read all material carefully
- Keep it professional
  - Include non-academic material IF relevant ("My work with the choir helped me to develop organizational skills and to work effectively with other people.")
- Address clear weaknesses with counter-evidence if possible
- Strike proper balance: Not too self-deprecating, but avoid appearing arrogant.

## 8. Letters from Referees

12

- Provide referees with relevant info
  - Transcripts, your statements, GRE scores (percentiles), dates, ... (if me, lots of reminders!)
- Ask referees to address areas to be evaluated
  - e.g., NSERC: research potential, leadership, ...
  - Departments may have their own rating forms
- Ask referees to address possible weaknesses
  - e.g., Although Bill Smith does not have an outstanding GRE quantitative score, he has done well in quantitative courses. Jane Parker's verbal scores could have been stronger, but she has demonstrated excellent performance in courses involving communication skills (seminars, essays, ...).
- Become known / familiar to faculty members!

## 9. Finding More Information

13

- Library: U of W, U of M
  - Applying to Grad School in Psych (BF77 A67 2008)
  - Getting Into Graduate School: ... Psychology ( LB 2371.4 2015)
- Internet
  - see following (e.g., links to sites on applying to graduate school in psychology ...), Google
  - <http://ion.uwinnipeg.ca/~clark/grad>
- Other Resources
  - University Faculties of Graduate Studies
  - Student Services, Graduate Studies, ...??