**Purpose of the FAQ**

First, the Clinical Psychology application process is an uneven playing field. Applicants without adequate mentorship may have limited access to the information provided here. People should have equal opportunities when it comes to graduate school applications and processes. An uneven playing field perpetuates biases and a lack of diversity in graduate student admissions, which has consequences for who continues in academia and/or clinical practice. The primary goal of this FAQ document is to help “level the playing field” across all applicants and to facilitate holistic evaluation of graduate student applicants.

Please note that the information in this document is specific to my values as the lab director and how I evaluate applicants interested in working with me at the Sexuality and Well-being Lab.

**FAQ**

1. **How do I know if I am a “good fit” for your lab?** I am most interested in the **fit** between (1) your interests, experiences, and training/career goals, and (2) my lab’s mission and values, and (3) my own strengths and weaknesses as a scientist and mentor. Generally, applicants who are the best fit for my lab and mentorship tend to:

* **Demonstrate commitment to our lab mission** (*identify cognitive and affective factors contributing to sexual health and well-being in individuals and couples*). Commitment to this mission may be demonstrated through your past experiences in academic and/or applied settings and should be communicated in your statement of interest and CV. Please see current projects (https://swelllab.psych.ubc.ca/research/) and recent publications for more information (https://swelllab.psych.ubc.ca/publications/.)
* **Demonstrate commitment to the lab’s values.** Like our lab mission, you can demonstrate alignment with my lab’s values and goals through past experiences and in your statement of interest.
* Have accrued **independent research experience**. For example, conducting an independent honours thesis study; leading or having a major independent role in a research project; presenting first-authored posters or talks at research conferences; publishing peer-reviewed articles.
* The SWell Lab uses multiple methodologies to answer questions regarding sexual health and relationships. I’m especially interested in recruiting applicants with **experiences** in some or all the following areas (however, you can still apply even if you do not have any of these experiences):
* Acquiring, preprocessing, and/or analyzing psychophysiology data (e.g., heart rate, skin conductance) using systems like Biopac.
* Acquiring, preprocessing, and/or analyzing eye tracking data (e.g., dwell; pupillometry), particularly using Tobii Eye Tracking Systems
* Collecting and/or analyzing ecological momentary assessment (EMA) data and/or daily experience data
* Collecting and/or analyzing dyadic data using multi-level or structural equation modelling
* Coding moment-to-moment affect in the context of dyadic interactions. Experience using Observer XT and/or other Noldus hardware/software is an asset
* Open Science practices (e.g., pre-registration)
* Coding and/or programming (e.g., Matlab, R, Python)
* I am best suited to support students who are interested in **careers that involve basic and/or applied research.** Careers in basic research include faculty positions (e.g., in departments of psychology, obstetrics and gynecology), jobs with some government research agencies (e.g., Canadian Institutes of Health Research), and research-focused positions in the private sector. On the *applied research* side, experiences in my lab best prepare students for employment in academic medical centers.
* Consistent with the training model at UBC, I believe that a strong foundation in research methods and knowledge of evidence-based practice is essentialto becoming an effective clinician. I support students who are interested in careers involving clinical practice; however, the research expectations during your graduate training are similar to those who are interested in a research career.

1. **What about the GRE? How important are my scores?** I am aware of the data suggesting that the GRE systematically disadvantages BIPOC and low-SES applicants. There is not strong evidence that supports the validity of the GRE for predicting success in graduate school. As such, I am not convinced that the GRE is a good indicator of which applicants will succeed in graduate school, and as scientists, teachers, and clinicians. With this in mind, I review applications holistically, and try not to overvalue any one source of information.
2. **I do not have an A average in my last two years of study and/or in my Psychology courses. Will this remove me from consideration?** The Department of Psychology’s website notes that grades for students admitted into our Clinical Psychology program almost always reflect an A average (at least in the last two years of study and in Psychology courses. However, this is not an absolute requirement for admission, so not having an A average does not remove a student from consideration.

Many factors can influence grades, 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 grades do not reflect your potential as a future scientist, please ask your referees to share more about your circumstances to contextualize your achievements, and/or provide this information in application (e.g., the SOI). To the extent that you feel comfortable, please share information that will help me contextualize and better understand the sections of your application (e.g., grades, course work, research experiences).

1. **Should I email you to express my interest in applying to your lab?** I read emails from prospective students, and I try to reply promptly. However, whether you email me will have **no impact** on how your application is evaluation or your odds of being short-listed, being invited to interview, or being offered admission. If you choose to email me, please include a summary of who you are and your research interests, as well as your unofficial transcript and CV.

I encourage you to review information about my lab and our research that is available online on our website. A complete list of citations for our published articles is available here: https://swelllab.psych.ubc.ca/publications/. If you cannot access one of our papers and would like to read it, email me and I will send you a copy.

If you have specific questions that are not addressed here, please get in touch via email.

1. **My interests are a good fit, but I have no background in** sexual health and well-being. **Can I still apply to your lab?** Yes! Research on sexuality has been growing exponentially in the past 30 years, but human sexuality is a niche field. I expect that *most applicants* to my lab *will not* have led or worked on research projects about sexuality. Thus, I recommend using your statement of interest to indicate why you are interested in studying sexuality in graduate school. My research program integrates methodologies and paradigms used in many different areas and I am enthusiastic about skills that students may bring to the lab that will strengthen our research program.
2. **What should I include in my statement of interest?** I find it helpful when applicants include the following in their SOI:
3. A clear statement of your general research interests and how they relate to my lab’s mission and values
4. A clear statement of why you are interested in my lab, versus other labs that study sexuality
5. A statement about your career goals (even if they are subject to change)
6. Discussions of your independent research experience(s) and what you learned from them. In these discussions, I suggest emphasizing: your research questions and their importance; the methods you employed and why these were well-suited to answer the question; the skills you developed (e.g., coding/running analyses; writing sections of a paper; submitting/presenting a poster); and what your “takeaways” were from the project (e.g., new research ideas).
7. How your experiences and interests are shaped by EDI values.
8. **I am mainly interested in a career focused on clinical practice, but I have heard that mentioning this in my application or interview will negatively impact my application. Is this true?** My lab is ideal for students seeking rigorous training in both research *and* clinical practice. This is an integral aspect of the scientist-practitioner model. Our research projects involve both clinical (e.g., diagnostic interviewing and delivering interventions) and research (e.g., selecting measures, designing experiments) skills. I view strong clinical training as *especially* important for trainees and students should expect to accrue clinical experiences through working on projects in my lab.

The clinical psychology program at UBC emphasizes scientific training, and students who benefit most from our program tend to want careers that incorporate research in some way. My lab shares this focus on preparing students for careers with a research emphasis. I support students who are interested in careers involving clinical practice; however, the research expectations during your graduate training are the same as those who are interested in a research career.

1. **My lived experiences (e.g., my own or my relative’s mental health difficulties, as a member of an underrepresented group) shaped my interest in psychology, but I have heard that I should not mention this in my application. Is this true?** The answer to this question will differ depending on who you ask. It is my opinion that experiences shape our interests and goals in important ways. In our lab we value lived experience and often recruit patient partners to review and provide feedback on our research questions, methods, and knowledge translation. If you are bringing lived experiences to your education and training, you are not alone. With that said, lived experiences should *not* be the focus of your SOI but could be integrated into your SOI (e.g., how your experiences inform your approach to research, your research questions). As described above, there are many other important pieces of information to cover in the SOI.
2. **Is it advantageous to list multiple mentors of interest (or just one) on my application?** Listing multiple potential mentors may be appropriate ifyour interests and goals clearly bridge two faculty members’ research programs. If you choose to list multiple mentors, it is your responsibility to convey how your interests bridge multiple domains in your SOI.
3. **I have never had to write a CV—just a resume. How should I organize this document?** Below are some great resources for creating a CV. You can also review the CVs of my graduate students available on our website.

* “[How to Write a Strong CV](https://www.psychologicalscience.org/members/apssc/undergraduate_update/undergraduate-update-summer-2013/how-to-write-a-strong-cv),” Association of Psychological Science
* [Example CV for clinical psychology applicants](https://psychology.unl.edu/psichi/Psi_Chi_Sample_CV.pdf), University of Nebraska—Lincoln

1. **What is the process like after I submit my application?** I value and prioritize equity, inclusion, and diversity in recruitment of graduate students, as well as the research we conduct in the lab. For these reasons I do not schedule informal interviews with students prior to the application deadline. This is not because I am not interested in meeting with you, but rather because not all students request to meet with me, and I do not want to unfairly advantage or disadvantage any student. I intend to schedule interviews with applicants in December or January once all applications are in and I have had the opportunity to **evaluate everyone at the same time using the same information**.  **I read all submissions from applicants who list me as a potential supervisor list.** I review each application in (roughly) the following order:
2. Curriculum Vitae Information: The Curriculum Vitae is an opportunity for you to summarize your education, research experience, leadership, and volunteerism, as well as community service. It is in your best interest to contextualize the content in your CV so that I am best able to evaluate your skills and accomplishments. For example, if you received an academic scholarship, you should specify what this was evaluated on (e.g., grades, leadership).
3. Statement of Interest: The UBC application requires a “statement of interest” where you explain the fit between your interests and my research program. The SOI is a writing sample. Along with the content, I use the SOI to evaluate your writing ability. **I value this aspect of the application highly.** Your SOI helps me to determine if I will be a good supervisor for you given your research interests and goals and if you will be a good fit for our program. I also use information you provide in your SOI to contextualize the rest of your application (e.g., grades, research experience and opportunities).
4. Reference Letters: A strong letter typically will be written by someone who knows you well, who can speak to your experience, skills, and abilities, as well as your academic potential for success in graduate school.Strong letters are detailed and specific. I look for areas in which applicants excel, ideally supported by examples. If there are grading norms in your undergraduate institution, this would be good for your reference letters to address explicitly to contextualize your transcript.
5. Transcripts: I do not use absolute grade “cut-offs” when evaluating applications. If an applicant’s GPA is lower than our department usually admits, I will look for patterns. For instance, a low GPA could reflect a tough semester (e.g., during COVID-19). Also, if there are good reasons for why your grades may not reflect your ability (e.g., having to work full-time during your degree), please provide this context in your application and/or ask one of your letter writers to speak to it. Within transcripts, I pay most attention to how students have performed in research methods/design and statistics courses because these skills are most relevant to graduate school and the research we will do together. I also look for any courses that really stand out (e.g., directed research courses; advanced statistics courses).
6. GRE Scores: At present there is no policy within the Clinical area regarding the use of GREs. As stated above, I do not prioritize GRE scores and prefer a holistic evaluation of applications using multiple metrics.

I create a **short list** from the applications I review using a holistic rubric to evaluate and score all applications. My shortlist typically has 8-12 applicants. I reach out to short-listed applicants and invite them to a brief remote interview (Zoom). In these brief (30 minutes) remote interviews, here is what I want to learn about applicants:

* What interests you most about the SWell Lab’s research? What are you most excited to learn more about?
* What research ideas do you have? What projects do you want to pursue in graduate school?
* What have you learned about the SWell Lab’s research already and how do you view your research interests fitting in with the lab’s overall research program?
* What experiences have you had related to equity, diversity, and inclusion and how would you contribute to the lab’s commitment to EDI?
* What questions do you have for me?

I then submit a subset of those short-listed applicants (~3) to a committee made up of clinical area faculty. As a committee we review applicants to ensure they meet or exceed minimum standards for admittance into the program. Once the committee approves students who I put forward, I will invite students to our Open House for meetings with myself, graduate students, the clinic training director, and other members of the clinical faculty. During the open house, you will have a longer meeting with me where we will discuss your research interests and experiences in greater detail. I will also assign a paper for us to discuss during this meeting. This is an opportunity for me to get a sense of how you approach research questions, your critical thinking, and what it might be like for us to work together during graduate school.

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**Resources on Holistic Evaluation**

* [Posselt, J.R. (2016). Inside Graduate Admissions: Merit, Diversity, and Faculty Gatekeeping. Harvard University Press.](https://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674088696)
* [Holistic Review in Graduate Admissions: A report from the Council of Graduate Schools](https://cgsnet.org/ckfinder/userfiles/files/CGS_HolisticReview_final_web.pdf)
* [Rubric Design & Use by Inclusive Graduate Education Network & California Consortium for Inclusive Doctoral Education](https://collab.ucsd.edu/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=97850348&preview=/97850348/105056333/Rubrics%20Module.pdf)
* [Holistic admissions resource page (University of Washington)](https://grad.uw.edu/equity-inclusion-and-diversity/programs-resources/for-faculty-and-staff/holistic-admissions-2/)
* [JDP Application Rubric and Holistic Review Process](https://collab.ucsd.edu/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=110553423&preview=/110553423/110553432/2020.11.30%20STUDENT%20SELECTION%20HOLISTIC%20REVIEW%20TRAINING%20AGENDA.pdf)
* [Work in Progress: A Holistic PhD Admissions Rubric–Design & Implementation (University of Virginia)](https://peer.asee.org/work-in-progress-a-holistic-phd-admissions-rubric-design-implementation.pdf)