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| **Becoming a School Psychologist**  **How to Select the Best Training Program for You**  Selecting an appropriate training program will be one of the most important decisions you will make in joining the profession of school psychology. There are approximately 200 school psychology training programs across the United States. These programs reflect considerable diversity in where they are located in the university (e.g., Department of Psychology, Department of Education), what they prepare you to do as a school psychologist (e.g., work as a practitioner, college/university professor, researcher), and how they prepare you to do it.  Before you start looking at different university programs, consider the following:   * To become a school psychologist, you will need to complete a graduate school program that awards a degree (Master's, Specialist, and/or Doctorate) specifically in school psychology. * To enroll in graduate studies, you will need to have your Bachelor's degree and any undergraduate prerequisites required by the programs(s) of your choice. * Most school psychology training programs include academic courses, supervised fieldwork and an internship to prepare you in both professional knowledge and skills.   To work as a school psychologist, you must be certified or licensed by the state in which you work. Employment in a public school setting generally requires certification by the State Department of Education.  Although individual states may have different requirements for certification, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) requires a minimum of specialist level training.  NASP requires that school psychology training include:   * A minimum of three years of full-time graduate study (or the equivalent) beyond the bachelor's degree, involving at least 60 graduate semester or 90 graduate quarter hours (the specialist level) * A one-academic year internship (included in the three full years of study) consisting of at least 1,200 clock hours of supervised practice, 600 of which must be in a school setting * Coursework and experiences as prescribed by the National Association of School Psychologists   For a student fact sheet describing different degrees and career options see [A Career in School Psychology: Selecting a Master’s, Specialist, or Doctoral Degree Program That Meets Your Needs](http://www.nasponline.org/students/degreefactsheet.pdf)  **Program Design**  Because school psychology is an applied specialty, coursework will involve both academic classes and applied experiences. In reviewing a program's curricular requirements or a sample program of study, you can evaluate: (a) its consistency with stated philosophies and goals; and (b) the type of training you will receive.  **Program Philosophy and Goals**  A program's philosophy, psychological orientation, and overall objectives are as important to consider as training levels and degrees offered. These program components should be clearly described in official program documents available to prospective students. Among the ways that programs vary are:   * Theoretical Orientation — e.g., Scientist-Practitioner, Scientist-Practitioner-Scholar * Professional Roles Emphasized — e.g., Intervention, Counseling, Consultation, Behavior Analysis, Psychometric Evaluation, Organizational Change, Research Program Evaluation * Population/Age Group Emphasized — e.g., Infants and Toddlers, Preschoolers, Elementary School Students, Adolescents, Emotionally Disturbed Students, Deaf or Blind Students, Culturally Diverse or Bilingual Populations   **Faculty**  Program faculty will be a significant influence in your graduate school experiences. In selecting a training program, determine how many full-time faculty members are assigned to the program in relation to the number of students. Also consider whether program faculty hold degrees in school psychology, whether they are active members of state and national professional organizations, the extent of their previous experience as practicing school psychologists, and their continuing professional experiences in school psychology. Talking with current or former students may help you find the program with faculty who will best meet your needs.  **Admission Requirements**  Admission requirements vary considerably from program to program. Undergraduate grade point average (GPA) is a primary consideration in admission to graduate study. GPA in psychology and GRE scores also are important for many programs. Recommendations, work and volunteer experience, personal interview results, and other factors are also important and may offset somewhat lower grades or GRE scores. Contact the programs that you are interested in to find out about their specific admissions requirements and application deadlines.  **Prerequisites**  Although the majority of individuals are now entering the field of school psychology with undergraduate degrees in psychology, students continue to enter graduate school with a variety of degrees including education, sociology, and child development to name a few. Your major field is less important if you have sufficient background knowledge in areas applicable to school psychology-- child development, psychology, education, etc. While an undergraduate major or minor in psychology is an advantage, it is not a requirement for graduate study in school psychology. Typically, school psychology training programs have certain prerequisite courses that must be completed by all applicants or admitted students. Clarify these prerequisites in advance so that you will have sufficient time to complete all such requirements.  **Financial Assistance**  Many school psychology programs provide financial support to help defer the costs of graduate school. During the 2005-2006 school year, sixty-nine percent of doctoral level students, fifty-seven percent of specialist level students and 55% of master’s level students received financial support.  Such support typically involves graduate research and teaching assistantships, tuition waivers, grants, and/or graduate scholarships or fellowships. Additional financial assistance opportunities may be available for minority students. Applicants should request financial information directly from the school psychology program. It also may be helpful to contact the university's Financial Aid Office or Graduate School.  When inquiring about financial aid, ask about the amount of aid, the nature and extent of services expected in return, the period of commitment, and the likelihood that the assistance will continue over time.  **Practica/Internship**  Every school psychology student should receive practica experiences that expose one to the field of school psychology. Practica occurs during the core program of studies and comes before internship. A one-year internship should be the culminating experience of your school psychology program and helps to integrate the knowledge and skills acquired earlier in your studies. It should be a comprehensive experience that is closely supervised by a school psychologist who holds the appropriate credential for the setting. Be sure to ask what support is provided students to find both practica and internship sites. Ask where interns are placed and whether those placements provide a salary/stipend. Ask if your university will allow you to complete your internship out-of-state and, if so, how university-based supervision is arranged.  Lastly, ask questions about graduation rates and employment opportunities for graduates.  Ask if you can talk with recent graduates to assess their satisfaction with the training they received and where they found employment.  NASP approves school psychology programs at the specialist and doctoral levels. For a current list of NASP-approved training programs see [www.nasponline.org/certification/NASPapproved.aspx](http://www.nasponline.org/certification/NASPapproved.aspx)  APA accredits school psychology programs at the doctoral level.  For a current list of accredited doctoral programs see [www.apa.org/ed/accreditation/schoolpsy.html](http://www.apa.org/ed/accreditation/schoolpsy.html). |

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