



## FAQs: Applying to join Dr. Galán's DREAM Lab as a PhD Student

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### Link to PSU Department Psychology website for Prospective Students:

<https://psych.la.psu.edu/graduate/prospective-students/>

### 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, I hope to help “level the playing field” across applicants to our lab.

Please note that all responses in this document reflect my personal opinions only. They may not reflect those of the Pennsylvania State University or of other faculty in our clinical psychology program.

### How do I know if I am a “good fit” for your lab?

When reviewing prospective students' applications, I am most interested in the fit between (1) their interests, experiences, and goals, and (2) our lab's mission, our research focus, and my own capabilities as a mentor. Overall, applicants who would likely be a good fit for the lab:

- Demonstrate commitment to our **lab mission** (to reduce inequities in child and adolescent mental health outcomes and improve access to mental health services among racial and ethnic minoritized youth through strengths-based approaches). Commitment to this mission may be demonstrated through your past experiences (both research and applied) and your personal statement. See our lab website for current or recently completed projects: [galanlab.org](http://galanlab.org)
- Want to pursue a career in **research** and have strong methodological, statistical, and writing skills.
- Have accrued **independent research experience** (e.g., by conducting a senior thesis, leading an independent research project, making a first-authored conference presentation).

I'm especially interested in recruiting applicants with **experiences** in some or all of the following areas (however, none of these are required of applicants):

- Qualitative data collection and analysis
- Using community-based participatory research (CBPR) methods
- Working on randomized clinical trial(s) with adolescent populations

**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?**

I aim to recruit students seeking rigorous training in both intervention research *and* clinical practice. Both skill-sets inform each other necessarily. Personally, the majority of my research ideas stem from clinical observations.

At the same time, the Pennsylvania State University'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. Consistent with this orientation, I may not be the most effective mentor for applicants who are interested *entirely* in clinical practice careers. I feel best-prepared to support students who are interested in **careers that involve clinical research**. This includes a wide variety of career paths, including academic faculty positions, e.g. in departments of psychology, education, social work, or public health; combined clinical-research careers, e.g. in academic medical centers; and non-academic careers in applied research or health policy.

**Should I email you to express my interest in applying to your lab?**

Although I welcome emails from prospective students, your decision to email me (or not) will have no impact on your odds of receiving an interview invitation or an offer of admission. Because I cannot equitably accommodate the number of requests for meetings with potential applicants, I do not offer to meet with applicants outside our program's formal interview process. However, if you are invited for an interview, you will have ample opportunity to ask questions (to me or current/past mentees!).

**What about the GRE? How important are my scores?**

**As of 01/06/2024:** Submission of GRE scores is not required, although they will be considered if you include them.

Please see the department's website for any updates or changes to this policy:

<https://psych.la.psu.edu/graduate/prospective-students/>

(Regarding my view on the GRE more broadly: The GRE systematically disadvantages racial and ethnic minoritized and low-income applicants. No strong evidence suggests that specific GRE scores are necessary for success as a researcher, teacher, or clinician. I review applications holistically, bearing these facts in mind.)

**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 me holistically assess your achievements, or (2) provide this information in your personal statement.

**My own experiences with mental health problems (e.g., my own, a friend's, or a relative's) shaped my interest in making treatments better/more accessible. I've been told not to mention this in my personal statement. Is this true?**

Speaking only for myself: No. 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. 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.

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

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

**What should I include in my personal statement?**

I find it helpful when applicants include the following in their personal statements:

- (1) A clear statement of your general research interests and how they relate to our lab's mission and work
- (2) A clear statement of why you are interested in working with me, in particular
- (3) A statement about your career goals (even if they are approximate/might change, it is helpful to see your thinking!)
- (4) Discussions of your independent research experience(s) and what you learned from them. In these discussions, I suggest emphasizing (1) the skills you developed from working on each project (e.g., data collection in Qualtrics; coding/running analyses; interviewing children/families; writing certain sections of a paper; submitting/presenting a poster), and
- (5) what your “takeaways” were from the project—e.g., new research ideas or questions your work inspired.

Also, here are real examples of personal statements written for clinical psychology PhD programs from current students, post-docs, and faculty in our field.

Get an outside eye. Having access to mentors who can help you craft personal statements is very helpful, but is also a privilege that might not be equally available to all. Get outside eyes on your essays. There might be resources at your own undergraduate institutions that can help with this, like library personnel, graduate students, or faculty. Attached is a [spreadsheet](#) with various academics who may be willing to help field questions and look over application materials.

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

I recommend the following resources:

- [Mote Lab Clinical Psychology PhD Tip Sheet](#) I HIGHLY recommend this resource!
- 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.*
- **Open Access Tips/Materials for Clinical Psych PhD Applicants**, provided by Mallory Dobias, B.S. A collection of open-access pointers, timelines, and materials—from sample e-mails to prospective advisors to 'before' and 'after' personal statements—from a PhD student in Dr. Jessica Schlieder's Lab!
- **Psychin' Out Slack Group**, an active community of psychology PhD applicants and students seeking and providing support and resources for the application process