

Frequently Asked Questions

Applying to join the Attitudes and Social Cognition Lab

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Will you be accepting a new PhD or MA student to begin in Fall 2027?

No.

What does the ASC Lab study?

This is probably the most important question to ask as you consider graduate programs. As undergraduates, students are often encouraged to go broad and try as many things as possible. This approach usually makes sense because most undergraduates are still trying to figure out what topic(s) they are interested in. However, graduate school tends to be very different. In graduate school, a student's focus is on a set of interrelated ideas that they can study in as much depth as possible in close collaboration with a mentor or set of mentors. Therefore, a fit in research interests is very important. The issue of what an interesting problem is inherently extremely subjective and it's crucial that you and your graduate mentor agree on what topics are worth studying. It is not particularly helpful to have an advisor who cannot actually advise you because your interests are too far afield from theirs.

I spent much of my early career contributing to theory and methodology in understanding implicit bias—evaluations and behaviors that are elicited automatically. My team has worked to understand the role of implicit bias in a variety of domains (e.g., health behavior, environmentalism), but my core research is in the area of *intergroup attitudes—thoughts and feelings about one's own and others' social groups*.

A list of ongoing lab research projects can be found on my [website](#). This information is up-to-date and I will consider students who are interested in any of these topics; however, as a Canada Research Chair I am currently prioritizing the first two topics on the list (institutional change and migration).

Where can I find information about the University of Waterloo graduate program?

You can find information about the Waterloo graduate application process [here](#). There are two important things to note: (1) There is a separate admission process for M.A. and

PhD programs, and (2) As stated earlier, currently we can only accept Canadian and permanent resident applicants into either program. It is generally assumed--but not guaranteed--that a student who successfully completes their master's degree and is making good progress in the program will be admitted to the PhD program.

Should I be worried that you are just started at Waterloo? Do you actually know what you're doing?

There's no need to worry! But... you should be aware that there are pros and cons of being among the first students in a new lab. On one hand, things might be slightly chaotic as we build up the lab with a small group, set up computers, order furniture and supplies, learn the policies and procedures at a new institution, etc. There will be a lot we'll have to figure out together. On the other hand, this is exciting! You'll have the opportunity to co-create something new and to imagine all the possibilities for how an excellent research lab can operate. I'm greatly looking forward to this process and happy to have graduate students long for the ride.

Can I meet with you to discuss my application before I apply?

Due to time limits and equity concerns, I do not meet with prospective students until they have been selected for an interview. You can learn about my research interests from my scientific papers and website (as described above) and you can learn more about how I run my lab by reading through the latest version of the [ASC Lab Manual](#).

How do I know if I am a good fit for the ASC Lab? What do you look for in an applicant?

Overall, applicants who are “good fits” tend to...

- Want to complete a PhD in our program (i.e., not a terminal master's degree).
- Demonstrate interest in the ongoing projects in the lab (most important!). I highly value approach-orientation, curiosity, and motivation to learn.
- Want to pursue a career in the behavioral sciences. This could include a wide variety of career paths, including academic faculty positions, non-academic research positions in government or industry, or careers in applied research and policy. I certainly do not expect that students want an academic path. That said, if you are interested *exclusively* in a career in data science, this is probably not the lab for you.
- Have independent research experience (e.g., undergraduate or master's thesis, leading a research project, and/or first-authored posters, talks, etc.).

- Have prior research experience in a scientific lab. While I do appreciate when applicants have worked with researchers who do work that overlaps with mine, any research experience is valuable.
- Be very conscientious, detail-oriented, good at problem-solving, and highly driven to (a) build their skills fast and (b) do both independent work and team-based work. I am looking for people who have demonstrated their ability to move multiple projects forward simultaneously and to balance disparate competing time demands.
- Have excellent written communication skills. Something that I have learned about myself over the years that I struggle to provide effective mentorship around writing. I *can* help you get better and to learn the formal and informal rules around scientific writing, but I do favor applicants who already possess a highly developed set of writing skills.
- Have a strong commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion in research and in building the lab culture. [Please know that, although this bullet point is last on the list, it is not last in importance.]

Although none of the following are required, I am especially interested in applicants with experiences in some or all of the following areas:

- Collecting and/or analyzing large-scale survey research
- Collecting and/or analyzing reaction-time data (e.g., from Implicit Association Tests)
- Lab-based and/or field-based intervention research
- Statistical analysis in R, SPSS, and/or Mplus
- Computer programming (e.g., JavaScript)

What is your mentorship style/what expectations do you have for graduate students?

Specific expectations for myself and for my graduate students are clearly outlined in the [ASC Lab Manual](#). I work well with students who take initiative in their work, who are generous collaborators, who continually seek and respond well to feedback, who are eager to learn and grow, and who are conscientious about organization, and deadlines. I rely heavily on students to move projects forward, and in the process students gain important research experiences, professional development, and authorship opportunities. I am actively doing research, I am invested in my students' success, and my relatively small lab group means you'll get personalized and energetic support from me. In return, I expect students to fully commit to their graduate studies and to active, sustained participation in lab, area, and department life.

What should I include in my research statement?

- A clear statement of your research interests and how they relate to the ASC Lab's mission and work.
- A clear statement of why you are interested in the ASC Lab in particular.
- A statement about your career goals (even if they are approximate/might change, it is helpful to see your thinking!)
- 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 and which kind of analyses; searching and reviewing literature through a particular lens; interviewing students/teachers; writing certain sections of a paper; submitting/presenting a poster; designing experiments), and (2) what your “takeaways” were from the project—e.g., new research ideas or questions your work inspired.

Credit where credit is due -- this FAQ was adapted from similar documents by Drs. Jessica Schleider (Stony Brook University), Kristy A. Robinson (McGill University), and Benedek Kurdi (University of Illinois).