

## FAQs: Applying to join the Lab for Scalable Mental Health as a PhD student

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### Why did you make this document?

The 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 Northwestern University or other faculty in the PhD programs noted below.

### Will you be accepting a new PhD student to begin in Fall 2026 (**updated as of 10/16/2025**)?

I **will** be reviewing applications to potentially admit one new PhD student for Fall 2026 matriculation. However, my **ability to admit a student will depend on the availability of funding, which (unfortunately) cannot be guaranteed very far in advance**. Applicants with a very strong interest in the lab are encouraged to apply. I will be reviewing applications submitted to both the [Clinical Psychology PhD Program](#) and from the [Health Sciences Integrated PhD Program](#), via the [Social Sciences & Health](#) Track. Both programs are housed within the Feinberg School of Medicine at Northwestern University.

**All PhD students in Dr. Schleider’s lab are fully-funded via lab research grants, contracts, external fellowships, and/or other research funds.** Dr. Schleider considers admitting new PhD students *only* when she can guarantee at least 4 years of full PhD funding.

### How do I know if I am a “good fit” for the Lab for Scalable Mental Health?

When reviewing prospective students’ applications, I am most interested in the **goodness of fit** between (1) their interests, experiences, and goals, and (2) our lab’s mission, our research focus, and my own strengths (and lesser strengths!) as a mentor.

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

- Demonstrate commitment to our [Lab Mission](#) (*develop and test brief, low-intensity interventions to reduce youth mental health problems at scale*). Commitment to this mission may be demonstrated through your past experiences (both research and applied) and your personal statement.
- Want to pursue a career in **child/adolescent intervention or dissemination/implementation science research**

- Have accrued **independent research experience** (e.g., by leading a senior thesis, research project, and/or first-authored posters, talks, or papers).

More specifically, applicants with the following **interests** may be good fits to our lab:

- Single-session, brief and low-intensity psychosocial interventions, **especially** web-based and self-administered interventions
- Single-session, brief, and low-intensity approaches to reducing youth depression, anxiety, disordered eating, or suicidal thoughts and behaviors
- Dissemination and implementation of scalable mental health tools beyond traditional clinical settings
- Community-partnered research to optimize brief mental health interventions for historically minoritized and underserved groups (e.g., LGBTQ+ youth; families facing financial insecurity; racial/ethnic minority youth)

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

- Working on randomized clinical trial(s) with adolescent populations
- Working on digital mental health interventions
- Open Science practices (e.g., pre-registration)
- Coding and/or programming (e.g., R, Python)
- Dissemination and implementation science
- Community-based participatory research and/or human-centered design methods

As a mentor, I feel best-prepared to support students who are interested in **careers that involve applied, clinical, intervention, and/or implementation and dissemination 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.

I believe that strong training in evidence-based practice is essential to becoming an effective, informed intervention scientist. "Practice-based evidence" is core to our lab's work and mission. However, I may not be the most effective mentor for applicants who are interested *entirely* in clinical practice careers.

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

Neither the Clinical Psychology PhD Program nor the Health Sciences Integrated PhD Program at Northwestern requires or allows the submission of GRE scores as part of their admissions criteria.. Neither program will not consider or accept scores from any applicant.

(Regarding my view on the GRE more broadly: The GRE systematically disadvantages BIPOC 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.

**Are there any other 'screening criteria' you use to review applications?**

No. You work hard on your application materials. The least I can do is read them! (And I *do* read all applications from those who indicate that I am their preferred mentor.)

**Should I email you to express my interest in applying to your lab? Can I meet with you to discuss my fit to the lab team?**

Your decision to email me (or not) will have **no impact** on your odds of receiving an interview invitation or an offer of admission. **Due to the high volume of messages I receive from applicants, I generally cannot respond to individual queries about the lab prior to the admissions deadline. My non-response is not an indicator of your admission likelihood and will have no impact on my review of your application materials.**

Whether or not you contact me in advance, prospective students are encouraged to review our online materials, which are designed to answer many common questions about our research directions, my mentorship approach, and our lab culture and values. These materials include our [Lab Mission](#) page, our [Prospective Students](#) page, and our [Open Resources](#) page (which also includes our full, open-access [Lab Manual](#)). If you have **specific questions** that are not addressed on these pages or on the PhD program websites, and that will determine your choice to apply, please get in touch, and I will do my best to address them.

Additionally, in the interest of fairness to all applicants, **I am unable to meet or speak individually with any applicant prior to the admissions deadline.**

**I am primarily interested in studying family relationships and/or stressors and their impacts on youth mental health. You have published in this area. Does this mean I'm a good fit for your lab?**

We focus on developing, evaluating, and systematically disseminating and implementing brief interventions to promote youth and parent mental health. If you want to study family factors *in the context of brief intervention development, evaluation, outcomes, or implementation*, our lab may be a good fit. If you want to study family relationships more broadly, e.g. how these relationships influence child development and/or mental health, our lab is unlikely to be a good fit (but I look forward to reading your future papers on the topic!).

**I am interested in studying therapeutic alliance, relational processes in psychotherapy, and/or the effectiveness of traditional (face-to-face, clinic-based) treatments. Should I consider your lab?**

Most of our interventions ([except one](#)) do not involve a therapist at all! We mainly study [self-administered, digital interventions](#). Applicants interested in studying clinic-based psychotherapy and/or therapeutic alliance are encouraged to consider other labs for graduate study.

**Single-session interventions sound neat, but I haven't studied or heard of them! Can I still apply to your lab?**

Yes! Many people have limited familiarity with single-session interventions (SSIs). Our lab hopes to change that.

If you have not engaged in SSI research before, please note in your personal statement why you are interested in studying brief interventions in graduate school. (There are many labs that do fantastic intervention research; why do you want to join a *single-session intervention* lab, specifically?)

**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 [our lab](#), in particular, versus other labs that study youth mental health treatment
- (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 (2) [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. (Mine is included in this document, as are many others from wonderful colleagues!)

**(For applicants to the Clinical PhD Program:) 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 Clinical Psychology PhD students seeking rigorous training in both intervention research *and* clinical practice. Both skill-sets inform each other in critical ways. Our lab develops and tests interventions, so I view clinical training as especially important for trainees in our lab.

At the same time, students who are happiest in our lab tend to want careers that incorporate research in some way. As such, I may not be the most effective mentor for applicants who are interested *exclusively* in clinical practice careers.

**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. In fact, [lived experience with psychopathology and/or mental health challenges has the potential to strengthen your work as a clinical psychologist and researcher](#). 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.

**Is it advantageous to list multiple mentors of interest (or just one) on my application?**

There is no inherent advantage to naming multiple mentors of interest on your application. I closely review all applications on which I am listed as a first-choice mentor. In many cases, applicants to our lab do not list multiple mentors of interest. Listing multiple potential mentors may be appropriate if your interests and goals clearly bridge two faculty members' research programs (as described in your personal statement)—and in rare cases, co-mentorship by two faculty members in the clinical area is possible. Applicants whose interests and goals primarily match the Lab for Scalable Mental Health do not gain an advantage by listing other faculty mentors on their application.

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

Detailed information on my approach to mentoring and expectations for trainees at all levels is available in our [Lab Manual](#).

**Can I reach out to current PhD students in your lab if I have questions about your lab?**

Certainly! Their email addresses are available on [this page](#).

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

Please feel free to use our [current graduate students' CVs](#) as templates/examples!

See also:

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

**I want to apply, but traveling to Northwestern for an on-campus interview would be burdensome and/or exceptionally difficult for me. What should I do?**

Northwestern University’s Clinical Psychology PhD Program and Health Science Integrated PhD Program both conduct all applicant interviews virtually. No travel is required of any applicant. This decision reflects the reality that requiring (and, indeed, even offering) on-campus interviews creates profound financial barriers to pursuing graduate education. These barriers disproportionately affect historically minoritized applicants and those from lower-income families, exacerbating inequities that our program is committed to fighting against.

**I want to apply, but the application fee would create real hardship for me. What should I do?**

Detailed information about Fee Waivers via the Graduate School (TGS) at Northwestern University, including eligibility information and how to apply, is available [here](#).

From the Northwestern TGS website: “TGS strives to support as many eligible applicants as possible. There may be some cases, however, where TGS may not be able to grant application fee waiver requests from all eligible applicants due to the volume of requests we receive. As a result, **we encourage applicants to submit their applications as soon as possible, since application fee waiver requests are reviewed on a first-come, first-serve basis.**”

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

I recommend the following resources:

- [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
- [So You Want to Go to Clinical Psych Grad School? ...Or Something?](#) Slides from a lecture that Dr. Jessica Schleider made for Stony Brook undergraduates considering careers in clinical psychology and allied disciplines. This includes info about different career options and degrees; preparing to apply for PhD programs; and how to obtain research and clinical experience.