During my junior year at UC Berkeley, I started working in Dr [redacted] research lab. For the first time, this allowed me to go behind the scenes and learn how research is conducted. I was unsure if academic research would interest me, but I loved learning about human behavior, so I was eager to try. It was in Dr. [redacted]'s lab that I first experienced data collection, experimental task development, eye tracking analysis, and Python programming. This opportunity then led to three other positions and, at the recommendation of my clinical psychology professor, I began volunteering at a crisis center and a psychiatric hospital. Soon, I was engaging in an array of extracurricular activities related to clinical psychology and found that I enjoyed all of them. Whether it was running an experiment, writing code, collecting data, or talking with a participant, I felt a sense of purpose that I had not felt elsewhere. I realized that the research I was working on could change what is known and possibly change the future. Even if that change was small, I was contributing to science. I eventually completed my honors research project in Dr. [redacted]'s lab and graduated *summa cum laude.* My plan was to apply to graduate school in clinical psychology, but first I wanted to obtain some exposure to clinical neuropsychology and develop additional research skills before applying. Specifically, I wanted to learn more about how the brain relates to behavior and how clinical populations are studied using neuropsychological methods. I eventually moved to Baltimore, Maryland to work with Dr. [redacted] at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine where I have been working for the past 2½ years.

Here I found exactly the kind of research assistantship I sought. My responsibilities are very broad and have given me ample experience with neuropsychological research. On a typical day, I might administer a battery of neurocognitive tests to a person with first-episode psychosis (FEP), score and enter test results in a computer database, conduct statistical analyses in SPSS or RStudio, or analyze brain imaging data through FSL or Freesurfer. I now am familiar with many procedures in data organization and often look to improve work efficiency by using Python or Linux scripts depending on the project. To date, I have co-authored three peer-reviewed articles, first-authored two posters, and given an oral paper presentation at the 2018 International Neuropsychological Society conference about affect recognition in FEP. Additionally, I have had the opportunity to meet many people with severe mental illness. I believe such interactions have allowed me to gain a greater understanding of the struggle a person with a mental disorder endures and a better idea of what I can research to help them.

I now want to obtain doctoral training in clinical psychology in order to learn more about mental disorders, their relationships to brain structure or function, and how they can be treated most effectively. Specifically, I am most interested in improving my understanding of schizophrenia spectrum disorders. As a research assistant, I have seen many features of schizophrenia, including cognitive dysfunction, anhedonia, depression, anxiety, hallucinations, and disordered thinking. I now understand schizophrenia as a complex ensemble of symptoms that can devastate a person's life. I want to contribute research that will benefit these people by further elucidating the debilitating symptoms that afflict them. In our FEP sample, we have found affect recognition deficits that persist even after controlling for other aspects of cognitive dysfunction. As such, I am most interested in conducting research on social cognition (e.g., affect recognition and related processes) and neurocognitive functioning as they relate to brain abnormalities in schizophrenia and other mental disorders. Ultimately, I aspire to a career that combines research and teaching on topics related to schizophrenia. I hope to obtain grant funding to support research and perhaps explore the development of methods that may assist in early identification of schizophrenia or lead to potential interventions.

The clinical psychology program at the University of [redacted] is an ideal match for my career goals. Your training emphasizes the integration of clinical practice and research, which I have come to appreciate is essential to the study of schizophrenia. If accepted, I hope to have the opportunity to work under the guidance of Dr. [redacted], whose research interests and accomplishments seem particularly germane to my interests and goals. Dr. [redacted]'s use of translational neuroscience methods to examine emotions and their relationship to neural functioning and cognition is particularly intriguing to me. I have experience administering tasks using facial affect and I see potential in integrating this type of task with psychophysiological measures, such as EEG or eye tracking, to study emotion perception in people diagnosed with psychopathology. As his student, I would want to learn more about his neuroscientific methodology, as well as how those methods can lead to the early identification of schizophrenia spectrum disorders.

I would be honored to receive an invitation to interview for doctoral training in your clinical psychology graduate program. Thank you for considering my application.