

Preparing for Graduate School Interviews in Clinical Psychology

Written by Hannah R. Thomas (thomasrhannah@gmail.com) & Claire Klein (clairecklein@gmail.com) while research assistants at the Center for Autism and the Developing Brain at Weill Cornell Medicine in May 2020. We wrote this after going through the application process for PhD programs in Clinical Psychology. Hannah joined Dr. Inge-Marie Eigsti's lab at UConn and Claire joined Dr. Laura Klinger's lab at UNC Chapel Hill.

- **Interview advice**

- First and foremost, if you have gotten an interview you are AMAZING
 - Once you have the interview, the 'competition' part is pretty much over
 - Yes, you will have other applicants interviewing with your mentor, but you have already proven you are qualified
 - Now they want to meet you and see if you would be a good ~fit~ for the program
 - Fit is just codeword for:
 - Personality match
 - Research match
 - Basically a vibe match
 - But, DO NOT FORGET, you are interviewing them too, so it is a two way street; you need to like them as much as they like you!

- **Preparing for Interviews**

- Yes, you should wear a suit
 - Also have at least 2 business casual outfits ready to go for cocktail hours and dinners
 - Traveling with a suit is hard – bring a steamer!
 - You can wear heels, but you will probably be walking. I (Claire) had a leather tote bag on all of my interviews with a padfolio with copies of my CV, a pair of flats, pens, a water bottle and protein bars.
 - Wear something nice-ish on the plane if graduate students will be picking you up (dark jeans and an appropriate top are fine)
- Yes, there are cocktail hours
 - If you choose to drink, which is totally fine (be yourself!), obviously be conscious of your intake and behavior
 - 1-2 drinks tops is usually a safe bet
- Do your research
 - You do want to be brushed up on current and past research
 - But don't kill yourself over knowing every article and presentation, just be conversational!
 - This will also help you come up with good questions that show that you're excited and smart!

- Read over everything you've sent to the professor (emails, your SOP) so that you remember what they know about you/what you emphasized your interests in
 - You will have to meet with faculty that are not your mentor
 - You DO NOT need to know everything about their research
 - Read their bio and maybe a few abstracts of papers
 - For the most part these meetings are the most casual
 - Ask general questions about the program, clinical training, etc.
 - You won't always know who this is – sometimes you'll get a schedule ahead of time, sometimes the night before – if they get it to you late of the day of they do NOT expect you to have fully prepared.
 - Know the program
 - Look over the handbook – don't read the whole thing, but at least the mission statement!
- **Interview Day**
 - You'll typically meet with your potential mentor, at least one other professor (this is to make sure that you're a solid person, show intellectual potential, and intellectual curiosity – it's also a good opportunity to ask program-specific questions), graduate students from your potential lab, graduate students from other labs
 - During the interview day each school will take a different structure, but the most confusing part is what to do in-between interviews.
 - Some schools will let you just do your own thing, others structure activities, and some will have graduate students in the room “in case you have questions” - don't be intimidated by this, they were in your shoes not too long ago!
 - Ask them questions if you genuinely have them, or just talk to them, or just talk to the other applicants! Try not to be on your phone and do your best to stay engaged even though it's a long day.
 - **Questions to ask students**
 - Is the stipend livable?
 - Where do students live?
 - Do students live alone?
 - This question may also tell you if a lot of people in the program is married – some people are really open to talking about stuff like this, if living with a partner or finding a partner is important to you, this is something that every graduate student thinks about too
 - Did you feel prepared to take your first clinic cases?
 - What was your supervision like?
 - How does authorship work in the lab?

- Are you happy?
- What is the mentor like?
- What do you do for fun?
- Where do you mostly work/study?
- Where do you spend the most of your time?
- What is the lab culture like?
- How is the research vs clinic balance?
- Where are the practicum sites?

- Older students – did you feel prepared to be applying to internship?
- What is your least favorite thing about the program?
- What is your least favorite thing about the lab/mentor?
- Is there anything you wish you would have known before starting?
 - Note on questions to ask students: it's ok to ask different students the same question – you may get different answers!

- o **Questions to ask mentors?**
 - What is authorship like in the lab?
 - What projects would an incoming student be working on?
 - How does funding work? TA? GA?
 - What projects are you most excited about?
 - Have any students applied to or gotten external grants?
 - Where are you past students now? Clinicians? Professors?
 - What is the dynamic/mentorship style like?
 - What conferences do you normally go to?

- **Accommodations**
 - o Be prepared for staying with graduate students
 - A lot of programs will have you stay with a current graduate student during your interview which is great for a few reasons
 - You get to see how/where students live
 - You have more down time with students for casual questions and conversations
 - You get a flavor of what it would be like to go there and be friends with these people
 - It is also bad for a few reasons...
 - You want to be totally self sufficient if you can
 - o Meaning bring your own steamer, hair dryer, towel etc.
 - You may have a crappy set up
 - o Bring a sweatshirt in case it's cold!
 - You are basically on a 24 hour interview, you can be casual and yourself but remember that everything is evaluative!!!
 - o Tips!

- Bringing something to say thank you can be a helpful way to break the ice – a box of Levain cookies or a few black and white cookies is a nice touch (we're New Yorkers ;))
- Some people also brought stationary so that they could leave a thank you letter
- **After Interviews**
 - After your interviews (on the flight home, at the airport, as close to the experience as possible!) take some time to reflect on what you thought.
 - Consider EVERYTHING – the rest of the lab, the center or larger group you would be working with, the clinical training, the other advisors/professors who would be teaching your classes, the other graduate students who would be supervising you, the people you interviewed with who would be in your cohort, what it felt like to be in the area/on-campus, EVERYTHING!