FAQs: Applying to join the Research and Interventions for Stress-related Conditions (RISC) lab as a Ph.D. student

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**Will you be accepting a new Ph.D. student to begin in the fall of 2022?**

Yes, I plan to accept a new clinical psychology Ph.D. student in this upcoming cycle.

**What makes an applicant a good fit to join the RISC lab?**

When reviewing applications, the most important characteristic that I am looking for is how well someone will fit into the RISC lab and, relatedly, someone who I believe will benefit from my mentorship.

**More specifically, applicants who want to pursue a career advancing our understanding of stress sensitivity, PTSD, and suicide through rigorous, neurobehavioral research will be the best fit for my lab.** Accrued experience in conducting research is also sought after. Some experiences that help prepare an individual for graduate school may include coordinating an independent research project, being the lead research coordinator of a study within a lab, completing an honor’s thesis, and/or completing research projects (e.g., being the lead author on publications or conference posters).

**Research interests that are a good fit for the RISC lab include, but are not limited to**:

* Neurobehavioral mechanisms contributing to the development, maintenance, and trajectory of anxiety-related conditions, including PTSD.
* Neurobehavioral mechanisms contributing to the development, maintenance, and trajectory of suicidal thoughts and behaviors (STBs).
* Utilizing lab-based stress paradigms in concert with intensive longitudinal data (e.g., ecological momentary assessments) to better understand neurobehavioral mechanisms of stress sensitivity and how it contributes to acute increases in PTSD and STBs.
* Improving our basic understanding of ERPs, including the LPP, P3, reward positivity (RewP), including the psychometrics (e.g., internal consistency, test-retest reliability).
* Developing and testing novel, transdiagnostic interventions through computerized CBT-based approaches, neurostimulation, or a combination.

**How important are GRE scores?**

The Clinical Psychology program at Auburn University has voted to waive the requirement for the GRE for the Fall 2022 matriculation cycle (i.e., for people applying to begin the program in Fall 2022). As such, I will not factor GRE scores into consideration. You will be neither penalized nor benefited from submitting your GRE scores. The GRE requirement will be revisited for the Fall 2023 cycle.

**My undergraduate GPA is below 3.5. Will I still be considered?**

Yes. GPA can be impacted by many factors that are unrelated to academic achievement and the potential for a successful research career. If you believe that your GPA does not reflect your potential as a scientist, please reflect on this in your personal statement.

**Are there other reasons that my application might be screened out?**

No. I read all of the applications thoroughly and use all of the information to determine which applicants are likely to be the best holistic fit in the RISC lab.

**Should I email you regarding my interest in applying to the lab?**

Whether or not you choose to email me to express interest in the lab will not improve or hurt your chances at being invited for an interview. However, if you have questions regarding the lab, our studies, or working with me that you aren’t able to find on the website or in this document, please feel free to get in touch.

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

Here are a few things that are helpful to include in your personal statement:

1. A clear statement of your career goals and how completing a Ph.D. under my mentorship will help you to achieve those career goals.
2. A clear statement regarding why working with me and in the RISC lab is a good fit for you.
3. A discussion of your research interests and why you hope to study those topics.
4. A discussion of your independent research experiences, including your role in studies that you have helped with and your experiences working on publications or posters.
5. A discussion of specific skills that you have acquired, including experiences with coding, EEG data acquisition, ERP data processing, statistical data analysis, or any other technical skills that could be useful to becoming an independent scientist.

**I aim to become a clinical psychologist with no or very little involvement in research, but have heard that mentioning this in the application process will hurt my chances.**

I aim to recruit graduate students who genuinely want to pursue a career as a clinical scientist. Therefore, individuals who are not interested in doing research would not be a good fit for my mentorship in the RISC lab.

With that said, I hold clinical practice as an important and irreplaceable component in the training of clinical scientists. The reason for this is clear: You must understand how psychopathology presents itself in real people to be an effective clinical scientist. Towards this aim, Auburn has *excellent* clinical training opportunities to facilitate Ph.D. student development into effective clinical scientists.

**What is your mentorship style and what are your expectations for Ph.D. students?**

My aim as a mentor is to help you develop into an independent clinical scientist ready to embark on a career in research. Towards this over-arching goal, I take a developmental approach in which we will have more detailed one-on-one meetings earlier on in your graduate career as you are working to identify the broad questions that you aim to address. We will then work together to cultivate your program of research that seeks to shed light on these questions. Timely responding and feedback is **critical** to this process, so I make a concerted effort to respond to all emails and provide feedback on manuscripts as soon as possible. In most cases, this will occur within 24-48 hours unless there are specific circumstances (e.g., travel).

Further, I am a firm believer in learning by doing and maximizing your effort toward items that can help your CV. With this in mind, you will have the opportunity to help with ongoing studies in the lab early on in your graduate career and will then transition to leading your own studies when you have gained the skills necessary to do so.

In line with the goal to train clinical scientists, you will be expected to consistently publish throughout your time in graduate school. Lab data will be provided, but you are also encouraged and expected to conduct and publish your own studies under my mentorship.

**What are some of the things that I will learn under your mentorship?**

My goal as your mentor is to help you develop into an independent clinical scientist. Thus, I aim for you to learn everything that you will need to know in order to be able to conduct your own studies and run your own lab. This includes, but is not limited to: Generating and testing hypotheses using rigorous neurobehavioral methodology, writing IRB applications, coding your own neurobehavioral tasks, processing ERP data, analyzing ERP data, using principal component analysis (PCA) to extract latent ERP components, using multi-level models to analyze intensive longitudinal data.

The major software packages that I use for ERP processing are Brain Vision Anlayzer - 2 and Matlab. The software package that I use for neurobehavioral tasks is Eprime. The software packages that I primarily use for statistical analyses are R, SPSS, and Mplus. However, these are subject to change as new methodology emerges.

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