Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for Prospective Graduate Students

Are you accepting PhD students?
I am accepting graduate applications for Fall 2024. I strongly prefer to accept students applying to our developmental psychology PhD program since I am faculty in the developmental area. However, I also review applicants from the clinical and affective/social/cognitive areas, and I am open to taking students in these areas if our research interests align.

Should I apply to work with you?
If you are passionate about the research we are doing in the lab and getting training to become an independent researcher using the methods we deploy in the lab, you would likely be a good candidate for our lab. I am looking to train students who plan to incorporate research into their career, whether that is in academia, policy, government, or elsewhere. If you're not planning for a research career, or you would like to have a full-time clinical position, our lab will likely not be the right fit for you.

Some areas of training in the lab include working with children and families, stress assessment, biological sample collection (saliva, blood, hair), cardiovascular assessments, behavioral coding, health behavior measurement (diet, sleep, eating behavior, physical activity), assessing social relationships, experimental developmental methods, data analysis in large longitudinal datasets (especially longitudinal structural equation modeling), and disseminating science to the community. If these training areas sound interesting to you, you will likely be a good fit for our lab.

What do you look for in potential PhD students?
I am looking for highly motivated graduate students who are passionate about reducing health disparities and improving health for individuals who have experienced adversity. Our lab culture is very important to me. We have a lab full of kind, supportive,

thoughtful, and passionate scientists who are generous with their ideas, time, and skills. I want to bring in students who embody those characteristics, as I believe that healthy lab environments are crucial for the wellbeing of its members, and they improve our science as well.

The most important criterion when I review grad applications is match in our research interests. We don't have to have the exact same interests, but if I don't think I can do a good job of mentoring you so that you can do the research you want, I will likely not accept you into the lab (nor would you want me to!). If you have specific research questions you want to answer in grad school, tell me in your personal statement! That shows me that you've thought a lot about the research area you want to pursue in graduate school, and it can give me more information about whether I am the right mentor for you.

The next most important criterion is that you have research experience. If you have had less than a year of research experience, I will be nervous that you may not be ready to commit the next 5 years of your life to graduate research and then a career to it. Showing that you have had ample research experiences is important. If you have taken the initiative on projects, such as writing a senior thesis or taking on a leadership role on a project, that is further evidence that you understand what you're getting yourself into. You don't need research experience in our specific lab research area (my undergrad research experience was on cognition and depression in adults, which is very different from my graduate research), but I do like knowing why you're passionate about studying this research topic for grad school.

A bonus is having a background in neuroscience, physiology, or biology. We incorporate a great deal of biology and health methods into our work, so having that background will give you a head start, but it is not necessary. I will still seriously consider your application even if you have a low GRE or GPA, especially if you have a passion for our research area and ample research experience. However, it can be good for you or one of your recommenders to explain low scores or GPA if there were reasons for it.

What projects are going on in the lab right now?
We are currently focused on three data collection projects. The first is an NIH-funded study targeting mediators of the association between childhood adversity and adolescent cardiovascular health, including stress system regulation, diet, eating behaviors, sleep, and physical activity. The second is an NIH-funded study testing whether improving mental health during pregnancy reduces cardiovascular risk in offspring during preschool (https://careprojectdenver.org/research). The third examines whether siblings can be effective social buffers for children and adolescents so that we can improve the effectiveness of psychosocial interventions.

I highly encourage students to analyze secondary datasets to answer important developmental questions. In the lab, we have used the following datasets: Add Health, ALSPAC, Future of Families and Child Wellbeing Study, Santiago Longitudinal Study,

Minnesota Longitudinal Study of Risk and Adaptation, and LONGSCAN. I would be happy to help you figure out how to use these or other datasets to answer your research questions.

<u>What is your mentoring style?</u>
I like to adapt to what the individual student needs. Some students need more guidance on certain topics than others, and I want to identify those topics for each student so that I can give you the mentoring you need. I am definitely not one to micromanage or hover over you since I trust you came to grad school to learn and to do research! But I do like to stay involved in your training by meeting regularly, giving feedback on lots of your drafts, and having talks about your research interests and career goals. I expect to meet with students more often during the first years of grad school than in later years since you will ideally become more independent over time. I am hoping to transition you into becoming an independent researcher for your career.

If you are a grad student in my lab, I am making a lifelong commitment to your personal and professional development so you can and should reach out to me for assistance or to share your accomplishments even after you get your PhD!

<u>Do you have any resources for writing a strong application?</u>

I'm glad you asked! Some of my colleagues (Drs. Kathryn Fox and Jessica Schleider) have curated a list of resources to help with applying to PhD programs, which can be found below:

For tips on writing a CV, see
- "How to Write a Strong CV," Association of Psychological Science
- Example CV for clinical psychology applicants, University of Nebraska—Lincoln
- The Curriculum Vita: A Student's Guide to Preparation, Psi Chi

Examples of personal statements curated by Drs. Jessica Schleider and Craig Rodriguez-Seijas can be found here.

Additional resources here (some are geared towards clinical psych but have principles that are helpful for all areas of psych:

- **Mitch's Uncensored Advice for Applying to Graduate School in Clinical Psychology,** provided by Dr. Mitch Prinstein, UNC Chapel Hill.
- **Getting Into Psych Grad School**, provided by the Council of University Directors in Clinical Psychology.
- **Open Access Tips/Materials for Clinical Psych PhD Applicants,** provided by Mallory Dobias, B.S.
- **So You Want to Go to Clinical Psych Grad School? ...Or Something?** by Dr. Jessica Schleider