

Information on Graduate Education in Psychology Costs

Graduate education in psychology is incredibly important. Not only can it help individuals like you attain their career goals, but it is a crucial segment of the *mental health workforce pipeline*, which refers to the pathways through which individuals can become mental health professionals. There is a shortage of mental health professionals everywhere in the United States; at the same time, mental health concerns in the U.S. continue to grow. As a result, it is very important that we foster the next generation of mental health professionals.

To become a mental health professional requires a graduate (master's [approximately 2 years] or doctoral [approximately 4-6 years]) degree. One barrier to the *mental health workforce pipeline* is the cost of obtaining a graduate degree. The costs can be direct (tuition; books) as well as indirect (costs of living while in graduate school; professional attire; attendance at professional conferences). Due to the training requirements, which are necessary and important but also expensive, doctoral training in Health Service Psychology—Clinical, Counseling, and School Psychology, which are the only psychology doctoral degrees with which one can obtain a license as a psychologist—can be especially cost-prohibitive.

On the following pages, we are going to provide you with information about the cost of graduate education and training in psychology. **Please read this information carefully, then answer the questions on the subsequent pages.** We hope that this information will be helpful to you. Please note that our intent here is not to discourage you from graduate education in psychology—indeed, nearly all of us involved in this study are engaged in (or received) graduate education in psychology, and again, it is an **absolutely critical** part of the *mental health workforce pipeline*. Rather, we hope to provide helpful information and to assess awareness of the information we are about to present.

The first step in seeking graduate education in psychology is applying to graduate programs. This stage involves both spending money as well as reviewing available financial information about the graduate programs that you are going to consider.

Application Costs that you can anticipate include (but are not limited to):

- Application fees (per program)
- The Graduate Record Exam (GRE) fee (\$205 to take the test itself, per attempt)
 - Note: They do offer some fee waivers (first come, first serve, and must qualify); if you obtain one, it covers 50% of the cost of the test.
 - Other test fees: \$50 to change testing centers or subjects; \$25 late registration fee
 - May also want study materials or a study course; books may range from \$20-70 each, courses vary widely
- GRE score fees (\$27 per program, to send your scores)
- Undergraduate transcript fees
- If you have any history of criminal justice involvement, there may be additional fees associated with obtaining relevant records for program and/or university review

Graduate programs each have different costs associated with them as well as different financial support available. You should review this carefully and consider it in the context of your circumstances when you are considering graduate programs.

Some terms to consider: **Graduate Assistantships; Stipend; Tuition Waiver; University fees; Health Insurance; Fellowships**

Graduate Assistantships: These are part-time (usually 10 to 20 hours per week), university-based employment opportunities that usually offer some kind of pay. These may be paid at an hourly rate or, more often, as a *stipend* (similar to a salary). Things to consider with assistantships:

- These are much more rare in master's programs, but they do sometimes exist
- Based on some publicly available data, subspecialty averages in psychology range from \$15,000 to \$24,000 per year.
- These should be nearly universal in doctoral training
- Pay varies widely, and is not always commensurate with the surrounding cost of living.

- Some assistantships include *tuition waivers*, which means that they pay for your tuition **in addition** to offering regular pay.
 - If they *do not* include tuition waivers, your salary may go to paying your tuition
 - If they *do* include tuition waivers, they may or may not include out-of-state tuition
 - They may or may not cover the full tuition of international students

University fees, separate from tuition, also vary widely.

- Assistantships may or may not cover fees
- Fees that you are responsible for may be nominal or may be substantial
- Some programs, especially doctoral programs, may have enough funding available to fund every student every year; some may not.
 - You will almost never find a program that will *guarantee* funding beyond the first year – that is alright. This is largely because your graduate program handbook is a binding legal document, and should something catastrophic occur that depletes funding, any commitment they made in writing could create problems. As a result, most universities require this “not guaranteed” language. What you want to get a sense of is, on average, what percentage of their students receive funding and for how long.
- Some universities will offer *health insurance* as part of their graduate assistantships; some will not.
 - Some universities, especially those whose graduate students are unionized (e.g., the State University of New York system), will offer good, affordable health insurance to their graduate assistants.

- Some universities may offer health insurance policies to their graduate assistants, but they may be more expensive and/or not cover much
 - Some universities may offer policies for purchase that can, once again, be highly variable
 - Some universities may not offer health insurance
 - Some universities may prohibit you holding any additional outside employment if you accept an assistantship
- assistants.

Financial Information to Look For in Accreditation Data

In Health Service Psychology (Clinical, Counseling, and School), the **American Psychological Association (APA)** accredits doctoral programs (and, soon, master's programs). This accreditation is important to look for, as it signals a reliable curriculum, some level of quality control, and that you will be license-eligible upon graduation as long as you meet other licensure requirements.

As part of this accreditation, APA requires that all APA-accredited graduate programs disclose certain information, in a certain format, in a visible place on their websites. You will always find it at a link called, "Student admissions, outcomes, and other data." This includes enrollment rates, attrition rates (the % of students who leave without graduating), graduation rates, licensure rates, internship match rates (this is critical! More on this later), and program costs.

Reporting on costs varies widely; there is no standard format required for "other" costs, so some programs may only report the cost of fees, books, and materials, whereas others may include costs of living. Still, this information is **very important** to review. Here are two anonymous examples of the APA-required *first-year costs* table. These required data only apply to those who are in their first year of the doctoral program, and

Program #1 is a Counseling Psychology Ph.D. program at a state university. As you can see below, they reported their average cost of *tuition* to be zero dollars because, on average, they fully fund their first-year students; some programs may report the average cost of tuition even if they fully fund their students, in the interest of full disclosure. They do not accept part-time students. The fees required at this university, however, are *very* high, and not covered by the assistantship funding; thus, a student may receive a \$14,000 stipend (20 hours/week for 9 months; summer funding, everywhere, is usually separate and less available), but expect to spend over half of it on university fees. At this university, we know that the assistantship does not cover university fees; thus, these fees are the students' responsibility. It is unknown what the "additional estimated costs" here are, but given this cost, it is likely books and professional development (such as conference travel)—*not* costs of living.

Program Costs

Description	2020-2021 1 st -year Cohort Cost
Tuition for full-time students (in-state)	\$0
Tuition for full-time students (out-of-state)	\$0
Tuition per credit hour for part-time students (<i>if applicable enter amount; if not applicable enter "NA"</i>)	NA
University/institution fees or costs	\$7,266
Additional estimated fees or costs to students (e.g. books, travel, etc.)	\$3,265

Let's look at another one.

Program #2 is also a Counseling Psychology Ph.D. program at a state university. They report their tuition costs even though we know that they fully fund their first-year students (including tuition waiver). The tuition waiver does *not* include fees; however, these fees are much more typical and reasonable (\$1,067 per year vs. Program #1's \$7,266). Similar to program #1, their additional estimated fees or costs are likely books and professional development, as this cost is too low to cover costs of living.

Program Costs

Description	2021
Tuition for full-time students (in-state)	\$558 per credit
Tuition for full-time students (out-of-state)	\$1080 per credit
Tuition per credit hour for part-time students (<i>if applicable</i>)	N/A
University/institution fees or costs	\$1,067
Additional estimated fees or costs to students (e.g. books, travel, etc.)	\$1,200

Be sure to review this information if you are applying to APA-Accredited programs, or seek out this information if you are not. It is perfectly acceptable—and in fact, important!—to ask questions about this information.

The Interviewing Stage

Even before COVID, some programs were moving to Zoom interviews to reduce the cost burden on applicants. Now, even more have done so. As a result, some of your interviews may not cost much at all; some professional attire, perhaps some time off of work. If you *do* need to interview in person, however, here are some things to consider.

Costs: You may need to pay for travel (plane ticket; gas/tolls/parking; other forms of public transit), lodging (hotel stay), and/or food.

Support: Some programs may have some support available, such as funding assistance, student-hosted potlucks (free food!), or a tradition of asking existing graduate students if an applicant can stay with them during the interview period. It is perfectly acceptable to ask about such support.

The Costs of Being a Student

This is where the majority of costs are incurred. You probably hear a lot about the “student loan debt crisis”; graduate education across the board (not just psychology) is the biggest driver of the student loan debt crisis, accounting for 50% of all student loan debt despite only representing approximately 25% of student borrowers. This is for a number of reasons:

- In master's programs and some types of doctoral programs, there is little to no funding available; and, some programs are inordinately expensive
- Even when “good” graduate assistantship (or fellowship) funding is available, it often is not enough to cover all educational costs (e.g., fees, books, travel to/from some work sites, professional attire, conference attendance) or costs of living (e.g., rent, utilities, transportation, food, health care, emergencies). Thus, many graduate students rely on student loans to cover the gaps.

Costs to Consider

- Tuition (if not covered)
- University fees (if not covered)
- Books and materials
- Professional attire
- Professional membership fees (e.g., membership to the American Psychological Association; \$55 for graduate students; membership to APA divisions, which varies)
- Attendance at professional conferences (registration fees as well as travel)
- Transportation to and from work sites such as practicum sites, assistantship sites
- International student fees (if applicable)
- Internship-related fees (more on that next)

Predoctoral Internship

In **Health Service Psychology** (Clinical, Counseling, or School Psychology), it is required that students complete an official predoctoral internship before the degree can be earned. This internship is usually full-time for one year (may in some circumstances be part-time for two years); is often required to be APA-Accredited (APA also accredits predoctoral internship programs); and must go through the formal internship *match* system, APPIC. Very often, students must move (sometimes far away) from where their graduate program is to attend the internship to which they match. Students do have control over where they apply; however, restricting oneself geographically can lessen the likelihood of matching to an internship, and progression toward the degree cannot occur until a predoctoral internship is obtained and completed. The process is, briefly, as follows: Applicants apply to a large number of APA-accredited internship sites through the match system, and after reviewing applications, students receive interview offers from some programs. Applicants interview in December and January of their second-to-last year of their doctoral program; Thus, this is an important milestone, but sometimes an expensive and unanticipated one. Let's look at some of the costs required.

Match fee: \$130

Application fees: \$50 for the first program; \$32 per application for programs 2 through 15; \$60 per application for programs after the 15th. It is recommended that students apply to a minimum of 12, and 15 if possible; cost to apply to 15 programs would be \$498 (not including Match fee or professional attire).

Even before COVID, many programs were moving to Zoom interviews to increase access and equity, and certainly even more are doing that now; however, historically, applicants would have to spend a lot of money to travel around the country for interviews. APPIC surveys students each year about the costs they incurred as well as other information.

Average # of applications submitted by applicants: 15.8

Average # of interview offers received by applicants: 7.4

Percentage of interviews that were in-person (i.e. may have required travel if not local): 69%

Average application costs per applicant: \$500

Average travel costs per applicant: \$1,570

Average "other" costs: \$251

Note that these survey results do not include the cost of relocating for internship; relocating after the one-year internship; or any costs associated with needing to travel back to one's home institution for things such as dissertation defense or graduation.

Upon Graduation

After completion of the internship (for doctoral study in health service psychology), there are still additional costs. As well, student loans go into repayment. We discuss both of these below.

First, let's look at the recent research on student loan debt in graduate psychology education. Please note that this is specifically for **doctoral-level education in professional psychology**; to our knowledge, data are not available for master's degrees in psychology. In general, the more years that one spends in education, the greater the borrowing; thus, master's-level education likely leads to more student loan borrowing than undergraduate degrees but less than doctoral education.

Recent research demonstrates that student loan borrowing in doctoral level is substantial, but also highly variable.

The overall *mean* of borrowing (of those earning or holding a Ph.D. or Psy.D. in psychology) is \$126,205, but the *standard deviation* is \$110,612. This means that 68% of doctoral students and graduates in psychology borrow between \$15,593 and \$236,817 – that's an incredible range and means that there isn't really an "average" borrower. So why do some people borrow almost nothing, and others borrow over \$200,000 to earn their doctoral degree in psychology?

- Access to resources: Students of color and lower socioeconomic status students (and in some cases, women) borrow more due to less access to resources
- Type of program and funding available: The average borrowing for Psy.D. students and graduates is much higher (\$198,553) than students and graduates in Health Service Psychology with Ph.D.s (\$98,810).
- Borrowing has increased astronomically over time due to changing economic conditions in the United States, and is continuing to do so

Post-Graduation Fees

Many fees that graduates will encounter after they earn their graduate degree are only applicable to those in practice-oriented specialties (again, predominantly Health Service Psychology, whether at the master's level or doctoral level). One that is applicable across the board is the cost associated with moving for one's first job. Other fees encountered by those in practice-oriented specialties include:

- State licensure application fee (varies by state; the Georgia state board for psychology charges \$100)
- Fees for background checks and fingerprinting (varies by state)
- Jurisprudence (law) exam fee (varies by state; GA psychology is \$85)
- National Licensure Exam Fees (for doctoral-level psychology, there are now two required exams; the first one is \$687.50, the second one is \$450, and these are both fees-per-attempt).
- Due to the importance of the national exam, graduates often buy study materials which may range from \$500 to thousands of dollars.
- After you obtain your license, you must pay an annual (or bi-annual) fee to maintain it
- You must also keep a liability insurance policy, the cost of which varies by state, type of practice, and policy. A psychologist can expect to pay \$750 to \$1,000 per year for their liability insurance.
- If you move states, you do not have to take the national exam(s) again, but you will likely have to pay initial fees and jurisprudence exam fees again.
- If you are licensed in multiple states, you must pay in each state (including the annual or biannual fees).
- Board certification—the highest level of credentialing, and after licensure—is usually optional, but for those who choose to pursue it, fees to pursue it can be approximately \$1,000, and there are additional annual fees to maintain it.

Thank you for taking this survey. We know that the information presented here, while important, can also be stressful – and we want to emphasize that we want more people, not fewer, to earn graduate degrees in psychology! This study was based on the recognition that many undergraduate and even master's students are not aware of the costs associated with graduate study; and, the same is true of available resources.

There are a number of financial resources available, including scholarships and fellowships, to help fund graduate education. Even when student loans are required – and they often are – there are a number of student loan repayment programs available for after graduation. We have compiled a list of resources for you that includes scholarships, fellowships, and student loan repayment programs. Please feel free to save this information ([you can download a copy of this resource sheet by clicking here](#)); or, you may obtain a copy by e-mailing the primary investigator, Dr. Melanie Wilcox, at mwilcox@augusta.edu.

Resources for Psychology Graduate Students

General Scholarships:

- [Scholarships and Fellowships](#)
- [APA/APAGS Award for Distinguished Graduate Student In Professional Psychology](#): \$1,000 - 2,500
- [Early Graduate Student Researcher Award](#): \$1,000
- [Psi Chi/APA Edwin B. Newman Graduate Research Award](#): \$1,000
- [SPSSI | Otto Klineberg Intercultural and International Relations Award](#): \$1,000
- [Stephanie Nicole Ross Foundation Graduate Scholarship](#): \$1,500
- [APF Ungerleider/Zimbardo Travel Scholarships](#): \$300
- [APA Student Travel Award](#): \$500
- [APF Violet and Cyril Franks Scholarship](#): \$1,000
- [SPSSI | Clara Mayo Grants](#): \$1,000
- [APF Visionary Grants](#): Up to \$20,000
- [APS Albert Bandura Graduate Research Award](#): \$1,200
- [APF Graduate Student Scholarships](#): \$2,000 - \$5,000
- [AHRQ Grants for Health Services Research Dissertation Program \(R36\) | Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality](#): Up to \$40,000
- [Early Graduate Student Researcher Award](#): \$1,000
- [Scott and Paul Pearsall Grant](#): \$10,000
- [APAGS Psychological Science Research Grant \(PSRG\)](#): \$1,000
- [Student Awards – Society for the Psychological Study of Culture, Ethnicity and Race](#)

For Ethnic Minorities:

- [Ethnic Minority Student Resources and Information](#)
- [Ford Foundation Predoctoral Fellowships for Minorities](#)
- [Student Awards – Society for the Psychological Study of Culture, Ethnicity and Race](#)

For LGBTQIA+ Students:

- [Apply Now - Point Foundation](#)
- [APF Wayne F. Placek Grants](#): Up to \$10,000

- [Bisexual Foundation Scholarship Award: \\$1,000](#)
- [Point Foundation LGBT Scholarships](#)
- [Student Awards – Society for the Psychological Study of Culture, Ethnicity and Race](#)

Fellowships:

- [NSF Graduate Research Fellowship](#)
- [Ford Foundation Predoctoral Fellowship](#)
- [For New Applicants - Southern Regional Education Board](#)
- [Health Policy Research Scholars](#)
- [Minority Fellowship Program \(MFP\)](#)
- [Minority Dissertation Fellowship Program in Education Research](#)
- [AHRQ Grants for Health Services Research Dissertation](#)
- [APA Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Fellowship](#)
- [Predoctoral Fellowship in Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services](#)

Studying Abroad:

- [US Fulbright Program - Study/Research Awards](#)