UMSL School Psychology Program FAQs

What is a school psychologist?
School psychologists have specialized training in both psychology and education. They use their training and skills to team with educators, parents, and other mental health professionals to ensure that every child learns in a safe, healthy and supportive environment. School psychologists understand school systems, effective teaching and successful learning. They provide a variety of assessment, academic and behavior consultation, early intervention, prevention, program development and evaluation, and health care services within schools.

What are the degree requirements for certification and practice?
As in most states, school psychologist certification in Missouri requires completion of an Educational Specialist in School Psychology (Ed. S.) degree. The Ed. S. degree is a 60-hour, three-year fulltime program consisting of two-years of intensive coursework and a yearlong internship. To work as a school psychologist, one must be certified by the state in which services are provided. School psychologist certification typically is granted by the State Department of Education and supports practice only within school or educational settings. The provision of independent psychological services via private practice or community mental health agencies requires a doctoral degree in psychology and licensure by the State Board of Examiners in Psychology. School psychologists typically are not eligible for licensure or independent practice.

How is the job outlook?
A national shortage of qualified school psychologists has existed for many years, but the local demand is even more pronounced due to high rates of projected retirements in St. Louis City and County. Due to the rewarding nature of the job, excellent working hours and conditions, competitive salary and benefits, and favorable supply and demand characteristics, school psychology consistently is ranked among the top of all professions for the next decade. As of December 2015, graduates of the UMSL School Psychology Program have had a 100% placement rate within one month of graduation.

What are some of the major similarities and differences among school psychologists and other related disciplines such as school counseling, educational psychology, and clinical psychology?
While the UMSL School Psychology program is housed in the College of Education Division of Educational Psychology, Research and Evaluation, Educational Psychology and School Psychology probably are more dissimilar than Clinical or Counseling Psychology is from School Psychology. Roughly half of all school psychology programs across the country are housed in Psychology Departments, and the rest are located in Educational Psychology and Counseling Departments in Colleges of Education.

Educational Psychology focuses on the research and theoretical aspects of learning and behavior. It is not an applied specialty like clinical, counseling industrial organizational, or school psychology. An educational psychologist typically has a PhD degree in Education or Educational Psychology and works as a university professor or
with an agency as a researcher or program evaluator. Educational psychologists typically are involved with research projects in the pursuit of new knowledge, whereas school psychologists and the other applied specialties in psychology primarily use established research to solve academic, social-emotional, and behavior problems or evaluate research-based programs rather than conducting experimental research.

Individual psychological assessment and counseling services are provided by school psychologists, counselors, and clinical psychologists. Aside from settings, perhaps what most clearly separates school psychology from the other disciplines is its historical affiliation with special education and expertise in psychological measurement. Dating back to the late 1970s, school psychologists have been the primary school-based professional responsible for the assessments of cognitive ability, academic skills, and social-emotional behavior. These results are used to determine special education eligibility and programming for individuals with disabilities. In recent years school psychologists have been expanding their roles within the schools to include prevention and early intervention services and programs for regular education students, a role that often is shared with school counselors.

What is distinctive about the UMSL School Psychology Program?
The UMSL Ed. S. in School Psychology degree program has a cognitive-behavioral theoretical orientation with a strong emphasis on prevention and early intervention. The program prepares school psychologists who are uniquely trained as data-based problem solvers. Some of the primary responsibilities associated with this role are consultation with teachers and parents and the development, implementation, and evaluation of research-based interventions for individuals and groups. Our program prepares school psychologists who will work collaboratively with other school professionals toward the goal of improving academic, social-emotional behavior, and mental health outcomes for all children and youth.

Is the program accredited and is this important?
Our program is Fully Approved by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). Currently, UMSL is the only NASP-approved educational specialist program in the Missouri. NASP-approval is important because it demonstrates that the program has met the highest national standards for training in school psychology. Consequently, upon passing state and national certification examinations, UMSL graduates are eligible for School Psychology Certification from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and for the Nationally Certified School Psychologist (NCSP) credential from NASP. The NCSP greatly facilitates mobility with automatic certification in 31 states across the country. The UMSL School Psychology Program actually exceeds NCSP requirements, so to no surprise all of our graduates to date have obtained certification wherever they applied.

What degree do most incoming Ed. S. candidates hold?
The minimum requirement for admission to the UMSL Ed. S. in School Psychology degree program is a completed bachelor's degree with a 3.0 GPA. The vast majority of candidates admitted to the program, upwards of 90 percent, are psychology majors.
The rest typically come from Counseling or Teaching, but successful candidates have come from completely unrelated areas such as Business and Marketing, English, History, Information Technology, and Political Science to name a few. As long as the prerequisites of Developmental Psychology and Psychological Statistics are satisfied, any bachelor’s degree will suffice.

**What undergraduate coursework is recommended?**

Regardless of degree major, the more psychology classes one takes the better. In addition to the minimum admission prerequisites of Developmental Psychology and Psychological Statistics, other recommended courses include Abnormal Psychology, Theories of Personality or Theories of Counseling, Learning/Cognition, Physiological or Biological Psychology, Research Methods, Tests and Measurement, and any and all developmental classes (child, adolescent, life span, etc.). Furthermore, prospective applicants are encouraged to seek out opportunities to work with a faculty member as a research assistant or to carry out directed research.

Finally, any advanced courses, especially those in math, science, and English, are highly recommended. Additional coursework beyond the minimum general education requirements in these areas not only helps develop well-rounded school psychologists, but these undoubtedly will help improve GRE scores, too.

**What is the personal statement?**

The personal statement is an extremely important component of the application. In addition to providing the admissions committee with a writing sample, the personal statement gives the applicant an opportunity to highlight any unique qualities and experiences that will contribute to success as a school psychologist. Consequently, this is perhaps the only place where an applicant has a chance to stand out from the others prior to the personal interview.

Think of the personal statement as a written interview that describes why you want to be a school psychologist, what is it about the UMSL program that appeals to you, how did you find out about the field, what personal attributes and experiences do you possess that are a good fit with school psychology, how have your personal and professional experiences prepared you for this career, etc. Please note that the Personal Statement is separate from the one paragraph character limited Statement of Purpose section of the UMSL application. This is a formal, multi-page essay of up to five double-spaced pages that is to be submitted separately from the application. Tell us whatever you want us to know about you to make us conclude that you have done your homework about the field and are a good applicant. Some points to consider include:

- Briefly discuss your educational background, interests, and special skills.
- Describe how your past experiences with family, friends, education, work, and leisure have contributed to your decision to select the field of school psychology as your goal.
- Highlight any paid work and/or volunteer experiences you may have had, especially those involving children and youth and/or activities related to education or mental health.
• How did you learn about school psychology, and what influenced your decision to pursue this field for a career? What other careers have you considered?
• Describe your career goals and perception of the current and future roles and functions of a school psychologist.

**What else can you tell me about successful applicants and the application process?**
In recent years the typical candidate admitted to the School Psychology Program has a 3.42 undergraduate GPA, GRE-V = 149, GRE-Q = 146, GRE-W = 4.0. In addition, experience working with children and youth is highly desirable. The admissions committee considers each application component individually when reviewing and ranking applicants. As such, strengths in one area can help compensate for lower ratings in another. For example an applicant with extensive relevant experience and low undergraduate GPA or GRE scores potentially could be rated ahead of another applicant with outstanding academic credentials and no professional experience. The initial screening process will identify the top 20-25 applicants who will be invited for an on campus interview. Enrollment in the program is limited by NASP to 30 fulltime candidates at any given time. As such, anywhere from 8-12 applicants are admitted to each cohort.

**How are transfer credits handled for prior graduate coursework?**
Upon admission graduate transcripts will be reviewed in consultation with a school psychology program advisor to determine equivalency with courses in the Ed. S. curriculum. A maximum of 30 credits from a conferred graduate degree or nine non-degree credits can be accepted for transfer credit; however, due to the highly specialized nature of the Ed. S. curriculum, rarely does a master’s level applicant have more than 12-15 hours that can be applied toward the Ed. S. degree. All coursework used toward the Ed. S. in School Psychology degree, including transfer credits, needs to be completed within seven years of graduation. Waivers for courses older than seven years will be considered on a case by case basis in consultation with the advisor.

**What if I have other questions?**
In addition to the information available from the UMSL School Psychology Program page, the National Association of School Psychologists website ([www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org)) contains a wealth of information about the field. Contact your local school and ask to talk or meet with a school psychologist. It always is a good idea to job shadow with a couple of different school psychologists to get a better idea of what school psychologists do. Please do not hesitate to contact the UMSL Program Coordinator or other Program Faculty with your questions, as we welcome inquiries from anyone interested in learning more about school psychology and enjoy discussing the field with others to help determine whether or not school psychology is right for you.

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