

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 behavioral/mental health 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 1,400-hour 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; rather, they primarily are employed by public and private schools.

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 June 2017, graduates of the UMSL School Psychology Program have had a 100% placement rate within six weeks 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?

The UMSL School Psychology program is housed in the College of Education Department of Education Sciences and Professional Programs. Our department provides Educational Psychology, Educational Technology, and Research and Evaluation Methods courses that support the various professional programs across the College of Education. Educational Psychology historically has been more theoretical and focused on the production of research, whereas School Psychology is a research-based applied specialty that places greater emphasis on being good consumers and distributors of research. In this regard, School Psychology is more similar to Clinical and Counseling Psychology than it is Educational Psychology. Roughly half of all school psychology programs across the country are housed in Psychology Departments in Colleges of Arts and Sciences, and the rest are located in Departments of Counseling, Educational, and School Psychology Departments in Colleges of Education.

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 routinely will be 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 and evaluation. 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. The results of these evaluations are used to determine special education eligibility and programming for individuals suspected of having a disability.

In recent years school psychologists have expand 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. In August 2017 Nationally Certified School Psychologists in Missouri became the only school-based behavioral/mental health provider whose services are recognized for Medicaid reimbursement. This is a huge development for Missouri

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. The inclusion of Program Development and Evaluation and Facilitation of Organizational among our program emphases are rare among specialist level school psychology programs.

Is the program accredited and is this important?

The UMSL School Psychology Program is Fully Approved by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) through December 2023. Currently, UMSL is the only NASP-approved educational specialist program in the Missouri. NASP-approval is important because it demonstrates that a program meet the highest national standards for training in school psychology. Consequently, upon graduation, UMSL graduates are eligible for School Psychology Certification from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Nationally Certified School Psychologist (NCSP) credential from NASP. In addition to Medicaid reimbursement mentioned above, the NCSP facilitates mobility with automatic certification in 31 states across the country. Given that the UMSL School Psychology Program exceeds NCSP requirements, it is no surprise that all 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 (Child, Adolescent, Life Span, etc.) and Psychological Statistics, other recommended courses include Abnormal Psychology, Theories of Personality or Counseling, Learning & Cognition, Physiological/Biological Psychology, Research Methods, and Tests & Measurement. 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 you found 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 a formal, multi-page essay of up to five double-spaced pages. Use this space to tell us whatever you can to demonstrate to the admissions committee that you have done your homework about the field and why you are strong 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 applicant for the School Psychology Program has a 3.49 undergraduate GPA, GRE-V = 153 (58%), GRE-Q = 150 (39%), GRE-W = 3.72 (49%). 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 to campus for an interview. Enrollment in the program is limited by NASP to 36 fulltime candidates at any given time. As such, cohorts of 10-13 applicants are admitted each year.

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) 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. 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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