

Purpose of the FAQ

First, the Developmental Psychology MA/PhD application process is an uneven playing field. Applicants without adequate mentorship may have limited access to the information provided here. People should have equal opportunities when it comes to graduate school applications and processes. An uneven playing field perpetuates biases and a lack of diversity in graduate student admissions, which has consequences for who continues in academia and/or clinical practice. The primary goal of this FAQ document is to help “level the playing field” across all applicants and to facilitate holistic evaluation of graduate student applicants.

Please note that the information in this document is specific to my values as the lab director and how I evaluate applicants interested in working with me at the Centre for Infant Cognition.

FAQ

1. **How do I know if I am a “good fit” for your lab?** I am most interested in the **fit** between (1) your interests, experiences, and training/career goals, and (2) my lab’s mission, our research focus, and (3) my own strengths and weaknesses as a scientist and mentor. Generally, applicants who are the best fit for my lab and mentorship tend to:

- Demonstrate commitment to our lab mission of exploring the developmental origins of social and moral thought and action. Commitment to this mission may be demonstrated through your past experiences in academic and/or applied settings and should be communicated in your statement of interest and CV. Please see the lab website and recent publications for more information <https://cic.psych.ubc.ca/about/>.
- Demonstrate commitment to the lab’s values. Like our lab mission, you can demonstrate alignment with my lab’s values and goals through past experiences and in your statement of interest.
- Have accrued **independent research experience**. For example, conducting an independent honours thesis study; leading or having a major independent role in a research project; presenting first-authored posters or talks at research conferences; publishing peer-reviewed articles.
- The Centre for Infant Cognition uses multiple methodologies to answer questions regarding early sociomoral development. I’m especially interested in recruiting applicants with **experiences** in some or all of the following areas (however, you can still apply even if you do not have any of these experiences):
 - Experience with research with infants and/or young children
 - Acquiring, preprocessing, and/or analyzing eye tracking data (e.g., dwell; pupillometry), particularly using SMI Eye Tracking Systems
 - Acquiring, preprocessing, and/or analyzing psychophysiology data (e.g., heart rate, skin conductance) using systems like Biopac
 - Acquiring, preprocessing, and/or analyzing EEG/ERP data using systems like EGI
 - Coding Experience using Observer XT and/or other Noldus hardware/software

- Open Science practices (e.g., pre-registration, GitHub, RMarkdown)
- Coding and/or programming (e.g., Matlab, R, Python)
- ***I am best suited to support students who are interested in careers that involve basic research.*** The work done by graduate students in my lab is targeted at academic audiences interested in basic questions of the nature of the (sociomoral) mind. Although our discoveries may have implications for applied areas of child development, we do not intend to take an applied approach in our work, and I am not personally trained to (for instance) make applied recommendations nor to evaluate individual children's developmental trajectories. My mentoring style and expectations reflect this focus.
 - Of course, the research faculty career track is extremely competitive, and throughout the field and academia more broadly many talented and deserving students do not end up with a tenure-track position (and most faculty will first hold at least one post-doctoral position). Furthermore, many graduate students discover during graduate school that an academic career is not their ultimate goal. I do my very best to ensure that my students end up in the positions that best fit their interests and skill sets, wherever those may be. My former students work both within and outside of academia; jobs outside of academia include grant facilitation, Google, behavioural consulting firms, etc. More broadly, a PhD in developmental psychology/cognitive science can help to prepare students for a variety of jobs in industry and the applied research sector.

- **What about the GRE? How important are my scores?**

I am aware of the data suggesting that the GRE systematically disadvantages Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and low-SES applicants. There is not strong evidence that supports the validity of the GRE for predicting success in graduate school. As such, I am not convinced that the GRE is a good indicator of which applicants will succeed in graduate school, and as scientists, teachers, and clinicians. With this in mind, the developmental area at UBC has decided not to consider the GRE in applications to our labs.

- 2. **I do not have an A average in my last two years of study and/or in my Psychology courses. Will this remove me from consideration?** The Department of Psychology's website notes that grades for students admitted into our program almost always reflect an A average, at least in the last two years of study and in Psychology courses. However, this is not an absolute requirement for admission, so not having an A average does not automatically remove a student from consideration. At minimum, you must meet the minimum admissions requirement as posted on <https://www.grad.ubc.ca/prospective-students/application-admission/check-your-eligibility>.

Many factors can influence grades, including competing commitments (e.g., working part-time while in school), family obligations, and health challenges. Academic achievement is very important, but context is, too. If you believe your grades do not reflect your potential as a future scientist, please ask your referees to share more about your circumstances to contextualize your achievements, and/or provide this information

in your application (e.g., the statement of challenges that is part of the online application). To the extent that you feel comfortable, please share information that will help me contextualize and better understand the sections of your application (e.g., grades, course work, research experience).

- 3. Should I email you to express my interest in applying to your lab?** I read emails from prospective students and I try to reply promptly. However, emailing me (or not) will have **no impact** on your odds of being short-listed, being invited to interview, or being offered admission. If you choose to email me, please include a brief summary of who you are and your research interests, as well as your unofficial transcript and CV.

I encourage you to review information about my lab and our research that is available online. A complete list of citations for our published articles is available here: . If you cannot access one of our papers and would like to read it, email hamlinlab@psych.ubc.ca and we will send you a copy. Our website has pages describing several of our current studies.

If you have specific questions that are not addressed here, please get in touch via email.

- 4. My interests are a good fit but I have no background in infant sociomoral cognition. Can I still apply to your lab?**

Yes! Research on “baby morality” has been growing exponentially in the past 15 years, but is a fairly niche field. I expect that *most applicants* to my lab *will not* have led or worked on research projects about it. Thus, I recommend using your statement of interest to indicate why you are interested in studying this topic in graduate school. My research program integrates methodologies and paradigms used in many different research areas and I am enthusiastic about new skills that students may bring to the lab that will strengthen our research program.

- 5. What should I include in my statement of interest?** At UBC we now provide the following prompt specifying what to include in your SOI.

“All applicants must provide a detailed statement (1-2 pages) of their past research experiences as well as their current interests and objectives for graduate studies in Psychology at UBC. This statement will be read by prospective supervisors that you specify in your application and is an important factor in determining admissibility. Please be specific about your past experiences, including the research questions you pursued, the methods utilized and skills developed, and your takeaways from the project(s). Please also note the research questions you wish to pursue during your degree, and how these fit with the research being done in the prospective supervisor’s lab.”

- 6. My lived experiences (e.g., my own or my relatives’ mental health difficulties, neurodiversity, as a member of an underrepresented group) shaped my interest in psychology, but I have heard that I should not mention this in my application. Is this true?**

It is my opinion that experiences shape our interests and goals in important ways. With that said, lived experiences should *not* be the main focus of your SOI but could be integrated into your SOI (e.g., how your experiences inform your approach to research, your research questions). As described above, there are many other important pieces of information to cover in the SOI.

7. Is it advantageous to list multiple mentors of interest (or just one) on my application?

Listing multiple potential mentors may be appropriate if your interests and goals clearly bridge two faculty members' research programs. If you choose to list multiple mentors, it is your responsibility to convey how your interests bridge multiple domains in your SOI.

8. I have never had to write a CV—just a resume. How should I organize this document?

Below are some great resources for creating a CV.

- ["How to Write a Strong CV,"](#) Association of Psychological Science
- [Example CV for clinical psychology applicants,](#) University of Nebraska—Lincoln

9. What is the process like after I submit my application?

I value and prioritize equity, inclusion, and diversity in recruitment of graduate students, as well as the research we conduct in the lab. For these reasons I do not schedule informal interviews with students prior to the application deadline. This is because not all students request to meet with me, and I do not want to unfairly advantage or disadvantage any student. I intend to schedule interviews with applicants in December or January once all applications are in and I have had the opportunity to **evaluate everyone at the same time using the same information.** I read all submissions from applicants who list me as a potential supervisor list. I review each application in (roughly) the following order:

- I. Curriculum Vitae Information: The Curriculum Vitae is an opportunity for you to summarize your education, research experience, leadership and volunteerism, as well as community service. It is in your best interest to contextualize the content in your CV so that I am best able to evaluate your skills and accomplishments. For example, if you received an academic scholarship, you should specify what this was evaluated on (e.g., grades, leadership).
- II. Statement of Interest: The UBC application requires a "statement of interest" where you explain the fit between your interests and my research program. The SOI is a writing sample. Along with the content, I use the SOI to evaluate your writing ability. **I value this aspect of the application highly.** Your SOI helps me to determine if I will be a good supervisor for you given your research interests and goals and if you will be a good fit for our program. I also use information you provide in your SOI to contextualize the rest of your application (e.g., grades, research experience and opportunities).

- III. Reference Letters: A strong letter typically will be written by someone who knows you well, who can speak to your experience, skills, and abilities, as well as your academic potential for success in graduate school. Strong letters are detailed and specific. I look for areas in which applicants excel, ideally supported by examples. If there are particular grading norms in your undergraduate institution, this would be good for your reference letters to address explicitly to contextualize your transcript.
- IV. Transcripts: I do not use absolute grade “cut-offs” when evaluating applications. If an applicant’s GPA is lower than our department usually admits (but above the UBC minimum requirement), I will look for patterns. For instance, a low GPA could reflect a tough semester (e.g., during COVID-19). If there are good reasons for why your grades may not reflect your ability (e.g., having to work full-time during your degree), please provide this context in your application in the *statement of challenges*. Within transcripts, I pay most attention to how students have performed in research methods/statistics/directed research courses because these skills are most relevant to graduate school and the research we will do together.
- V. GRE Scores: Consistent with the broader policy of the developmental area, I will not use GRE scores in my evaluation of graduate applications.

I create a **short list** from the applications I review using a holistic rubric to evaluate and score all applications. My shortlist typically has 8-12 applicants. I reach out to short-listed applicants and invite them to a brief remote interview (Zoom). In these brief (30 minutes) remote interviews, here is what I want to learn about applicants:

- What interests you most about the Centre for Infant Cognition’s research? What are you most excited to learn more about?
- What research ideas do you have? What projects do you want to pursue in graduate school?
- What have you learned about the Centre for Infant Cognition’s research already and how do you view your research interests fitting in with the lab’s overall research program?
- What experiences have you had related to equity, diversity, and inclusion and how would you contribute to the lab’s commitment to EDI?
- What questions do you have for me?

I then submit a subset of those short-listed applicants (~3) to developmental area faculty. We review applicants to ensure they meet or exceed minimum standards for admittance into the program. Once the area approves students who I put forward, I will invite students to our Open House for meetings with myself, graduate students, and other members of the developmental faculty. During the open house, you will have a longer meeting with me where we will discuss your research interests and experiences in greater detail. I will also assign a paper for us to discuss during this meeting. This is an opportunity for me to get a sense of how you approach research questions, your critical thinking, and what it might be like for us to work together during graduate school. Once we have made the final decisions, the recommendations will be reviewed by the Area

Coordinator and the Graduate Advisor. Once approved, the conditional offer will be reviewed by the Faculty of Graduate & Post-Doctoral Studies and sent to the applicant.

Acknowledgements

Created by Dr. Samantha Dawson and Dr. Kiley Hamlin. We would like to acknowledge the materials generously shared with us by Dr. Nancy Sin and Dr. Jeremy Stewart that informed some of the content in this document.