

Multicultural Clinical Lab applicant FAQs

FAQs: Applying to join the Multicultural Clinical Lab as a PhD student

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Why did you make this document?

The clinical psychology PhD application process is an uneven playing field. Applicants without access to strong mentors, or without professional connections, may have less access to the information provided here. By sharing this FAQ document, I hope to help “level the playing field” across applicants to our lab.

Please note that all responses in this document reflect my personal opinions only. They may not reflect those of The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley or other faculty members in our clinical psychology program.

Will you be accepting a new PhD student to begin in Fall 2021?

Yes, I plan on accepting a new clinical psychology PhD student for Fall 2021 matriculation.

How do I know if I am a “good fit” for the Multicultural Clinical Lab?

When reviewing prospective students’ applications, I am most interested in the **goodness of fit** between (1) their interests, experiences, and goals, and (2) our lab’s mission, our research focus, and my own strengths (and lesser strengths!) as a mentor.

Overall, applicants who are “good fits” tend to...

- Demonstrate commitment to our [Lab Mission](#) (*multicultural mental health among culturally diverse groups*). Commitment to this mission may be demonstrated through your past experiences (both research and applied) and your personal statement.
- Want to pursue a career in **multicultural clinical research**
- Have accrued **independent research experience** (e.g., by leading a senior thesis, research project, and/or first-authored posters, talks, or papers).

More specifically, applicants with the following **interests** may be good fits to our lab:

- Produce new knowledge and deepen our understanding of multicultural mental health
- Treatment efficacy with culturally diverse groups
- Trauma and resiliency with the recent immigrant population
- Perceived stigma among caretakers of individuals diagnosed with an intellectual disability.

I’m especially interested in recruiting applicants with **experiences** in some or all of the following areas (however, none is required of applicants):

- Working with Spanish speaking individuals
- Working with immigrant populations

- Manuscript writing
- Advanced statistical analyses
- Presenting data at professional meetings

As a mentor, I feel best prepared to support students who are interested in **careers that involve applied, clinical, and/or intervention research**. This includes a wide variety of career paths, including academic faculty positions, e.g. in departments of psychology, education, social work, or public health; combined clinical-research careers, e.g. in academic medical centers; and non-academic careers in applied research or health policy.

I believe that strong training in evidence-based practice is essential to becoming an effective, informed intervention scientist. “Practice-based evidence” is core to our lab’s work and mission.

What about the GRE? How important are my scores?

The GRE systematically disadvantages BIPOC and low-income applicants. No strong evidence suggests that specific GRE scores are necessary for success as a researcher, teacher, or clinician. I review all applications holistically, bearing these facts in mind.

My undergraduate GPA is below 3.5. Will this remove me from consideration?

No. Many factors can influence one’s GPA, 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 GPA does not reflect your potential as a future scientist, please (1) ask one of your recommenders to share more about your circumstances to help me holistically assess your achievements, or (2) provide this information in your personal statement.

Are there any other ‘screening criteria’ you use to review applications?

No. You work hard on your application materials. The least I can do is read them! (And I *do* read all applications from those who indicate that I am their preferred mentor.)

Should I email you to express my interest in applying to your lab?

Although I welcome emails from prospective students, your decision to email me (or not) will have **no impact** on your odds of receiving an interview invitation or an offer of admission. Whether or not you contact me in advance, prospective students are encouraged to review our online materials, which are designed to answer many common questions about our research directions, my mentorship approach, and our lab culture and values. These materials include our [Lab](#) page, our [Current Projects](#) page, our [Publications](#) page, and our [Presentations](#) page. If you have specific questions that are not addressed on these pages, please get in touch, and I will do my best to address them.

I am primarily interested in studying intellectual disability. You do research in this area. Does this mean I’m a good fit for your lab?

We focus on deepening our understanding of multicultural mental health and when it comes to intellectual disabilities we focus on the mental health of caretakers and the factors impacting it

such as stigma. If you want to study intellectual disability *in the context of multicultural mental health and perceived stigma*, our lab may be a good fit. If you want to study intellectual disability more broadly, e.g. the etiology of intellectual disability our lab is unlikely to be a good fit (but I look forward to reading your future papers on the topic!).

I am interested in studying trauma and resiliency in immigrant populations but not Latinx immigrants. Should I consider your lab?

Most of our research focuses on immigrants coming from Mexico, the Northern triangle region (Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador) or South America. Applicants interested in studying immigrant populations from elsewhere are encouraged to consider other labs for graduate study.

Multicultural clinical psychology sounds neat, but I haven't studied it! Can I still apply to your lab?

Yes! If you have not engaged in multicultural clinical research before, please note in your personal statement why you are interested in studying multicultural clinical psychology in graduate school. (There are many labs that do fantastic clinical research; why do you want to join a *multicultural clinical* lab, specifically?)

What should I include in my personal statement?

I find it helpful when applicants include the following in their personal statements:

1. A clear statement of your general research interests and how they relate to our lab's mission and work
2. A clear statement of why you are interested in our lab, in particular, versus other labs that study multicultural clinical psychology
3. A statement about your career goals (even if they are approximate/might change, it is helpful to see your thinking!)
4. Discussions of your independent research experience(s) and what you learned from them. In these discussions, I suggest emphasizing (1) the skills you developed from working on each project (e.g., data collection in Qualtrics; coding/running analyses; interviewing children/families; writing certain sections of a paper; submitting/presenting a poster), and (2) what your "takeaways" were from the project—e.g., new research ideas or questions your work inspired.

I am interested in becoming a therapist and/or incorporating clinical practice into my future career. I've heard that mentioning this in my application will hurt my admissions chances. Is this true?

I aim to recruit students seeking rigorous training in both intervention research *and* clinical practice. Both skill-sets inform each other necessarily. Our lab develops and tests culturally adapted interventions, so I view clinical training as *especially* important for trainees in our lab (in fact, I am a clinical supervisor in our program's community clinic!).

At the same time, UTRGV's clinical psychology program has a very strong clinical science orientation, and students who are happiest in our program tend to want careers that

incorporate research in some way. Consistent with this orientation, I may not be the most effective mentor for applicants who are interested *entirely* in clinical practice careers.

My own experiences with mental health problems (e.g., my own, a friend's, or a relative's) shaped my interest in making treatments better/more accessible. I've been told not to mention this in my personal statement. Is this true?

Speaking for only myself: No. Life experiences shape our career interests, trajectories, and goals in meaningful ways. There is nothing wrong with acknowledging intersections between our 'human' and 'scientific' selves. However, personal/lived experiences should *not* be the main focus of your personal statement. Your research interests, experiences, goals, and 'fit' to our lab are much more helpful to me when reviewing your application.

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

There is no inherent advantage to naming multiple mentors of interest on your application. I closely review all applications on which I am listed as a first-choice mentor. In many cases, applicants to our lab do not list multiple mentors of interest. Listing multiple potential mentors may be appropriate if your interests and goals clearly bridge two faculty members' research programs (as described in your personal statement)—and in rare cases, co-mentorship by two faculty members in the clinical area is possible. Applicants whose interests and goals primarily match the Multicultural Clinical Lab do not gain an advantage by listing other faculty mentors on their application.

What is your mentorship style/what expectations do you have for PhD students?

- Develop your research ideas, which will eventually culminate in a dissertation. Identify the "big-picture questions" you would like your research to address. No single study will answer these big questions, but studies you conduct during graduate school may be able to explore aspects of them.
- Help mentor and supervise undergraduate research assistants in the lab. If you are interested in recruiting RAs specifically to work with you (this is highly encouraged!), please coordinate your recruitment efforts with me, and keep in mind that the same standards and expectations apply to all undergraduate RAs working in the lab.
- Present your work at conferences (1-2 per year is recommended). Try to prioritize papers/symposia over posters when you can.

Can I reach out to the current PhD student in your lab if I have questions about your lab?

Certainly! Her email addresses is frances.morales01@utrgv.edu

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

- ["How to Write a Strong CV,"](#) Association of Psychological Science
- [The Curriculum Vita: A Student's Guide to Preparation,](#) PSI CHI – The International Honor Society in Psychology

Where else can I find information and guidance for my application process?

I recommend the following resources:

- [Mitch's Uncensored Advice for Applying to Graduate School in Clinical Psychology](#), provided by Dr. Mitch Prinstein, UNC Chapel Hill. *A staple for those considering applying to graduate school in clinical psychology, from determining your best-fit career path to deciding between offers from Clinical PhD programs!*
- [Getting Into Psych Grad School](#), provided by the Council of University Directors in Clinical Psychology. *Fantastic guide from Directors of Clinical Training at Clinical Psychology PhD programs across the country.*
- [Open Access Tips/Materials for Clinical Psych PhD Applicants](#), provided by Mallory Dobias, B.S. *A collection of open-access pointers, timelines, and materials—from sample e-mails to prospective advisors to 'before' and 'after' personal statements—from a PhD student in our lab!*
- [So You Want to Go to Clinical Psych Grad School? ...Or Something?](#) *Slides from a lecture I made for Stony Brook undergraduates on considering careers in clinical psychology and allied disciplines. Includes info about different career options and degrees; preparing to apply for PhD programs; and how to obtain research and clinical experience.*