

A Message from Dr. Linda M. Raffaele Mendez, Coordinator of Admissions

Welcome to the School Psychology Program at the University of South Florida in Tampa, FL. Thank you for your interest in our program! In the paragraphs below, I would like to introduce you to our program and provide you with some insight into the admissions process.

In addition to reading the information below, I would encourage you to visit the section of our website that is labeled Admissions Information. You will see it on the grey bar on the right side of our homepage. Please note that we have one opportunity for admissions each year. The deadline for admissions is January 1st to begin the program the following Fall semester.

The first thing I want to do is give you the big picture of our program. We subscribe to the scientist-practitioner model of training. This model is used in many School Psychology training programs, although programs differ in their focus and orientation. Our program is guided by the problem-solving model and is focused on prevention and early intervention. We also have a focus on multi-tiered systems of support for students and systems change. We offer many hands-on learning experiences and lots of work with dyad partners. You are in schools from the first week you are here. You spend one day in the schools during your first year of training and two days in the schools in your second year of training. Your school-based experiences give you an opportunity to apply what you are learning in your classes to real life settings.

Our program has a strong focus on understanding of and embracing human diversity in its many forms. Toward that end, we actively seek students who will add to the diversity of our student body. Diversity in race/ethnicity, culture, socioeconomic status, language, religion, gender, sexual identity, country of origin, etc. among our students creates a safe environment that enhances learning for all and allows students to be exposed to the perspectives of others whose life experiences have been different from their own. In addition to actively seeking a diverse student body, we also strive to create learning environments in which collaboration is emphasized over competition and students are supported to achieve their own personal bests. Specific training experiences (e.g., cooperative learning, immersion in practicum settings that reflect diverse learners) and many levels of mentoring (i.e., student to student, individual faculty member to student, faculty dyad to student cohort) have been incorporated into the program to promote skills in collaboration (a much-needed skill set to work in this field!) and to access support from and build positive relationships with others in the program.

In terms of certification, our program is both APA accredited and NASP approved. We offer two degree programs—an Ed.S. and a Ph.D. You may apply to either program with a bachelor's degree in any field as long as you have taken our 3 prerequisite undergraduate courses—statistics, research methods and tests and measurement. Students earn a master's degree at the end of their first year of training. Since the "specialist level" is required for certification across the United States, training beyond the master's degree is required for certification. We award the Education Specialist degree, or Ed.S., to recognize the advanced level of training required for certification. If you already have some graduate training or an advanced degree, like a master's degree in Clinical Psychology, please read the section in our Admissions link

labeled “For Applicants with Prior Graduate Training.” In general, we can only accept 3 classes from another institution towards a degree at USF. If you already have a Specialist degree in School Psychology, you would likely be looking at 2 years of coursework, a dissertation, and a doctoral internship to earn your Ph.D.

In terms of the training at USF, we only offer a full-time program. Students typically are supported through assistantships, which provide students with a bi-monthly stipend; tuition waivers; and student health insurance. At this time, all of our students are supported by assistantships, which is relatively rare in School Psychology training programs. These assistantships are primarily grant-funded, which means that they are not guaranteed. However, since I have been at USF, we have provided assistantships to all students who wanted to have one. Most assistantships require students to work with a professor for 20 hours per week to earn the stipend, which is currently just under \$11,000 for Fall and Spring semesters combined. Most students have an assistantship from the time they begin the program until they go on internship.

In terms of the time to degree completion, the Ed.S. typically takes 3 years to complete. That includes 2 years of coursework and a school-year long internship. Ed.S. students also complete a thesis. Most students complete their Ed.S. internships in the area around Tampa, but it is possible to complete an Ed.S. internship elsewhere with prior faculty approval. The Ph.D. program usually takes 5 years to complete. It includes 3 years of coursework; a year of dissertation work; and a 12 month internship. Many of our Ph.D. students choose to pursue APPIC or APA-accredited internships, which are located throughout the U.S. Other doctoral students complete local internships in the Tampa Bay area. Some doctoral students split their internship between a school and a hospital or community mental health setting.

If you are not sure if you want to pursue the Ed.S. or the Ph.D., it is helpful to know that the two programs overlap considerably in the first two years of training. We have students who initially apply to the Ed.S. program but decide once they are here that they want to pursue the Ph.D. Those students do what we call “applying up,” and most are successful at moving into the Ph.D. program. This transition is relatively seamless because of the overlap in training in the early years of the two programs. It also is important to emphasize that we don’t really differentiate between the Ed.S. and Ph.D. programs in terms of the standards to which we hold our students. Students in both programs are held to the same high standard.

We also have an active and vibrant research climate. Our students regularly present with faculty at conferences and publish manuscripts with us. I would encourage you to review our individual faculty webpages to see the types of research in which our faculty are engaged. I think it’s important for you to know that you do not need to know exactly which faculty member you would want to work with when you apply to the program. Unlike programs that require you to commit to a particular area of research when you apply, we would prefer to have you get to know all of us and see what each of us is doing before you decide on your own research focus during your training. You also are welcome to work with multiple faculty

members. Many of our students are part of several research teams.

If you were to come here, you would be part of a cohort of students. Cohorts usually have 12 students or less. You take all of your classes with your cohort, which will consist of both Ed.S. and Ph.D. students through the second year. In the third year, the Ed.S. students go on internship, and the Ph.D. students take a third year of classes focused on leadership and supervisory skills. One of the benefits of being with a small cohort is that students form a tight-knit support system. This is something that can be very helpful in particular to students who may not have other friends or family in the area. I have seen many students form close friendships within their cohorts during the almost 2 decades I have been at USF. I also think it's important to point out that our training emphasizes collaboration rather than competition among students.

I also want to give you some insight into the admissions process. We typically receive about 80-100 applications per year and accept about 10-15% of students who apply to the program. There are many things you can do to enhance your application and chances of admissions success. I'm going to give you my Top 5 recommendations for applying to our program.

My first recommendation is that you do your homework about what School Psychology is all about. Many people apply to our program and tell us in their Statement of Goals that they want to work with children. There are many careers where you can work with children. We want to know more specifically why you want to study School Psychology and why you have chosen to apply to our program. A great website where you can become familiar with our profession is the National Association of School Psychologists' website, which you can access at www.nasponline.org. Another excellent thing to do is to talk to practicing school psychologists, and even better, shadow a school psychologist. It will be important for you to understand the specifics of what a school psychologist does if you are invited for an interview. So do your homework before you prepare your application and express in your Statement of Goals why you have chosen School Psychology as the career you want to pursue.

My second recommendation is to give some careful thought to who you ask to write recommendations for you. It is highly desirable to have letters from individuals who can speak to your academic potential. Ideally, these individuals have had you in an academic class and can share with us their perceptions of your ability to conceptualize ideas; to express yourself verbally and in writing; and to perform graduate work in general. It also is helpful if you have someone who knows your research potential write a letter of recommendation for you. Individuals who have supervised you in a work setting or know you personally can write letters for you but are not as helpful to us in estimating your academic potential. If you have not been in school for a while and don't have any professors who can write a letter for you, it may behoove you to take a course or two so you can ask those professors to recommend you.

My third recommendation is to really take some time with your Statement of Goals. This is your opportunity to tell us about yourself. Tell us your story and why you are applying to our program. If there are aspects of your application, like GRE scores, that you think do not truly reflect your academic potential, you should tell us why this is the case in your Statement of Goals. It also can be helpful if your professors mention this in their letters. I recommend leaving yourself a few weeks to write and revise your Statement of Goals. This will allow you to craft it into a document that reflects you and your goals for training. If you have current research interests that you want to pursue in graduate school, tell us about them, including any faculty with whom you would like to work. You are not locked into these choices, but they can help us to understand your current interests and what you would like to accomplish in graduate school.

My fourth recommendation is to carefully review your vita and writing sample. A lot of undergraduate students have a resume; this is what we are looking for. On your vita, please be sure to highlight your experiences working with children, your research experiences, and any honors or awards you have earned. If you have no experience working with children, it would be beneficial for you to gain some experience, either as a volunteer or through paid work. It also is beneficial for you to gain experience working with children from diverse groups, such as children who are ethnically, racially, or linguistically diverse. If you don't have research experience, I recommend that you join a research group in order to gain this experience. These are important aspects of preparation for our program. With regard to your writing sample, the best writing sample is a research paper written in APA style. If you don't have such a paper, you can choose a college-level paper that is not written in APA style. I also have had some students choose to take a course with a writing requirement so that they had a paper written in APA style to submit with their application.

My fifth recommendation is to put some effort into preparing to take the GREs or to retake them. I say this because GRE scores are used to determine which students are eligible for fellowships (which are different from assistantships). Some people ask me if they have low GRE scores if they will not be considered for the program. Here is what I would say about that: Given the high numbers of students who apply for our program, students really are competing against each other, so the better your overall application, the better your chances of being competitive in the applicant pool. With that said, we look at applications holistically, so if other parts of your application are excellent, you may still be considered with relatively lower GRE scores. Typically, we are looking for scores that are at the 75th percentile or higher on the Verbal, Quantitative, and Writing sections. If your scores are not quite at that level but there are other parts of your application that suggest you would be an excellent student, we do consider the whole picture in deciding which students we want to interview.

The last thing I want to share with you is what happens after you apply. When your application is complete, our faculty reviews it. We then select students whom we want to interview. In a typical year, we usually interview about 30 students. Interviews usually take place in January and February, with selection of students occurring shortly after interviews are completed. Students then they tell us if they would like to accept our offer of admission by April 15th. Once an offer is accepted, we set the new student up with a student mentor, who helps the new student to prepare for the transition to graduate school. We are pretty big on mentoring here, so you also are assigned a faculty mentor once you arrive in the Fall, and then you choose your research mentors for your thesis and your dissertation.

I hope you found the information I have provided here helpful. Please review our website for more information on our program. I also hope you will also take some time to watch the videos that our students made that will help you to understand why they chose to attend USF and the types of activities in which they have been engaged during their training. Thanks for your interest in the School Psychology Program at USF!