

# Chapter 30. Jobs and Grad School

## FUNDAMENTALS

### WHERE SHOULD I GO FROM HERE?

In the heading of most of the case studies and experiments, we've indicated the professional field to which they are most relevant; we did this to help you select the professional field you want to enter. Here are the professional fields we've often cited and that you might want to consider for a career<sup>1</sup>:

- ☞ Applied Behavior Analysis
- ☞ Behavior Social Work
- ☞ Behavioral Sports Psychology
- ☞ Behavioral Medicine
- ☞ Behavioral Developmental Disabilities (The Mentally Handicapped)
- ☞ Behavioral Special Education
- ☞ Behavioral School Psychology
- ☞ Behavioral Clinical Psychology
- ☞ Behavioral Community Psychology
- ☞ Behavioral Counseling Psychology
- ☞ Experimental Analysis of Behavior
- ☞ Organizational Behavior Analysis (Behavioral Industrial/Organizational Psychology)
- ☞ Behavioral Pharmacology

There's great overlap among many of these fields. For example, most of the studies relevant to behavioral special education are also relevant to behavioral school psychology and vice versa. And many are also relevant to behavioral clinical psychology.

In addition, they're all relevant to the mother field—behavior analysis, with its subfields Experimental Analysis of Behavior and Applied Behavior Analysis. A graduate degree in behavior analysis would be excellent training to deal with any of the problems dealt with by professionals in

those fields. The exception might be that to work in the public school systems, you will most often, though not always, also need a degree in Special Education or School Psychology. In many human services settings you will often need some sort of state license that might involve taking up to four nonbehavioral courses, whether you get your degree in Behavior Analysis, Behavioral Counseling Psychology, or Behavioral Clinical Psychology.

### WHERE SHOULD I NOT GO FROM HERE?

If you like the behavior-analysis orientation of this book, you'll want to choose your graduate program with special care, because most traditional programs are incompatible with behavior analysis and the approach this book advocates. For example, the main thrust is psychodiagnostics in traditional school psychology, traditional clinical psychology, and traditional industrial/organizational psychology. In other words, these traditional approaches often relegate the role of the psychologist to that of a mere test giver, one who purports to measure a person's "personality," "intelligence," "mental health," and "aptitude."

It's a long story, but we believe most testing does more harm than good, fatalistically putting a label on human beings, which generally does more to limit their future opportunities in life than to expand their horizons, in spite of the rhetoric of the multimillion-dollar testing establishment.

On the other hand, behavior analysts like Ivar Lovaas, working with children labeled autistic, have shown that we can save many of the people who are most lost. Of course, he had to ignore the predictions, theory, and philosophy of traditional psychology and traditional psychodiagnostics. And he had to make careful use of the principles of behavior—a much more optimistic approach.

Unfortunately, testing is sometimes a necessary evil. For example, many human-services jobs in the state of Michigan require that you be certified as an M.A. Limited License Psychologist or a Ph.D. Licensed Psychologist. This means you need to take from one to three graduate courses in testing, regardless of

---

<sup>1</sup> Although we've written this chapter in terms of continuing in behavior analysis, most of it applies to students wanting to go on in any field.

whether or not you will actually be testing. And many jobs may require some testing, even though you will mainly be doing behavior analysis. Some of my MA students bite the bullet, take the testing courses, and go for the Limited License certification; others say no, there are still enough good behavior analysis jobs in human services not requiring that certification.

In addition to concentrating on diagnosis in terms of the medical model, of course, traditional psychologists actually do work to help people with problems. However, their talk-therapy interventions are often too minimal and too ineffective, often involving little more than everyday, commonsense advice dressed up in the jargon of psychological reifications. The general, unstated assumption behind talk therapy is that there is no problem that a little insight and a little plausible-sounding advice can't fix. But the scientific data suggest almost the opposite: while talk therapy can sometimes help, there are few serious psychological, sociological, educational, behavioral problems fixed with an hour's advice once a week.

It may seem we're coming down too hard on tradition, but do a quick scan of the graphs in the previous chapters of this book. *Baseline* is usually just another name for traditional approaches that almost always lose.

People often say, "I want to sample the best of the traditional approaches and the best of behavior analysis and then apply what's appropriate to a particular cause." We call that approach *eclecticism*; and, at first glance, it seems the most reasonable, doesn't it?

But most often eclecticism is like trying to mix oil and water. And most often, to try to "apply behavior analysis" where it best fits and to try to "apply traditional approaches" where they best fit means that you don't really understand either. And, furthermore, it means that you've not committed yourself enough to any one approach to attain the level of expertise you will need to be an effective professional who can really help people.

This doesn't mean there is no value in studying traditional approaches from a behavioral perspective. But our observation is it requires a PhD level of expertise in behavior analysis before you can tread the dangerous swamps of traditional psychology without getting sucked into the

quicksand of mentalistic reifications and the medical model or else running for the superficial high ground of rejecting what might be salvaged from traditionalism. So our advice is this: If, and only if, you think behavior analysis is the way to go, get at least an MA and ideally a PhD in some form of behavior analysis. Do this before you risk blowing it with traditional psychology, at least if you think behavior analysis is the way to go.

Of course, if you aren't sold on behavior analysis, you should continue searching until you find something you are sold on, and then go for it wholeheartedly. Don't stand at the edge of the sandbox equivocating. Jump in and get your hands dirty and your shoes full of sand; start building those castles. Do what you can to work toward the well-being of your fellow human beings. For info on eclectic grad programs, check out

<http://www.abainternational.org/start>

## HOW DO I FIND THE RIGHT GRAD PROGRAMS?

Now suppose you say, "Yes, you behavior analysts have gotten my heart and my soul; where do I go from here?"

Probably into an M.A. program.

Which one?

Well, it's fairly easy if you can find one with behavior in the title. But there's a good chance you can't because many good behavior analysis programs are simply called school psychology, special ed., or even human development and family life. But watch out, because most are just the same old traditional, ineffective, unscientific stuff.

Where should you look for grad programs?

- ☞ Ask the teacher of this course.
- ☞ Go to the Association for Behavior Analysis' (ABA's) Web page called the Directory of Graduate Training Programs in Behavior Analysis  
<http://www.abainternational.org>
- ☞ It's all there with the programs listed by state, so if you want to select the state with the world's most ideal climate (i.e., Michigan, heh, heh, heh) you would find 4 grad programs listed, including—guess which one—WMU's, heh, heh, heh.

- ☞ Also, look through the references in this book for authors whose work you like and track 'em down. One of those authors may be looking for a grad student just like you. By the way, many of these people are the only, or the only one of two or three, behavior analysts in a traditional department. That way you'll get some unavoidable eclecticism. But don't think you can maintain your behavioral perspective in a program with absolutely no behaviorists; you can't. (You can probably find the addresses of your favorite behavior analysis researcher/authors in the ABA Membership Directory <http://www.wmich.edu/aba/membership.html>)
- ☞ Go to ABA's annual conference at the end of May and check out all the wonderful presentations by the behavior-analysis superstars, get some autographs, and go to all the presentations describing the grad programs. You can get info at <http://www.abainternational.org>. They hold the conference in cool places like New Orleans, San Francisco, Disney World, Chicago, and Washington, DC. But they've never held it at anyplace as cool as Kalamazoo.
- ☞ E-mail me ([dickmalott@dickmalott.com](mailto:dickmalott@dickmalott.com)), and I'll try to let you know if we have any special ABA grad school orientation programs going at the conference.
- ☞ Finally, here is a list of a few of the fine programs with a behavior analysis emphasis with which I am personally familiar and which I would personally recommend. There are many excellent ones I've failed to mention. This is just to get you started. And, again, there are many excellent opportunities with only one or two behavior analysts in a general department.

## WHAT ARE SOME GOOD MA AND PHD PROGRAMS?

Again, these are just some of the good programs in behavior analysis, generally the ones I know the most about. But there are many others equally as good.

**Western Michigan University.** Probably the world's best undergrad program with a strong emphasis on behavior analysis. Perhaps the world's most thorough and broad set of behaviorally

oriented grad programs: Behavior Analysis M.A.; Applied Behavioral Analysis, Ph.D.; Experimental Analysis of Behavior, Ph.D.; Behavioral School Psychology; Behavioral Industrial/Organizational Psychology; and Clinical Psychology. The Behavior Analysis M.A. and the Applied Behavior Analysis Ph.D. programs include specialties in organizational behavior management and also human services (in preparation to work with developmental disabilities, autism, and community mental health).

**University of Kansas.** The Human Development and Family Life Department, not the Psychology Department. By far the most outstanding applied behavior analysis research department in the world. If there were no University of Kansas, there would hardly be a research-based field of applied behavior analysis.

**Ohio State University.** Outstanding M.A. and Ph.D. programs in Applied Behavior Analysis and Behavioral Special Education. Excellent, close-knit faculty. Good teaching. Good family feel. Nice people.

**Auburn University.** Applied Behavior Analysis, Experimental Analysis, Organizational Behavior Analysis. Excellent programs; our students who go there speak highly of them.

**West Virginia University.** Applied Behavior Analysis, Experimental Analysis, Organizational Behavior Analysis. Excellent programs; our students who go there speak highly of them.

**University of Nevada, Reno.** Applied Behavior Analysis, M.A. and Ph.D. and Behavioral Clinical. Excellent programs; excellent faculty.

**University of Florida.** Excellent programs and excellent faculty in experimental and applied behavior analysis.

## WHAT ARE SOME GOOD M.A. PROGRAMS?

**Eastern Michigan University.** Behavioral Clinical Psychology. Excellent programs; our students who go there speak highly of them. They sponsor the March conference of the Behavior Analysis Association of Michigan.

**University of North Texas.** Applied Behavior Analysis. Excellent programs; our students who go there speak highly of them.

**University of California, Los Angeles.** Behavioral Counseling and Applied Behavior Analysis. Looks real good; no student reports at this point.

**University of South Florida.** Applied Behavior Analysis. Looks real good. New program; so no student reports at this point.

## **ABA APPROVED PROGRAMS**

Here's another way to cut the cake: ABA (the Association for Behavior Analysis) has accredited 10 programs in 7 universities, so you might want to check them out.

**California State University, Los Angeles.** M.A. program of the Department of Psychology

**Ohio State University.** M.A. and Ph.D. Programs in Applied Behavior Analysis from the Department of Education Services and Research

**Southern Illinois University.** M.S. Behavior Analysis and Therapy Program from the Rehabilitation Institute

**Southern Illinois University.** M.S. Behavior Analysis and Therapy Program from the Rehabilitation Institute

**St. Cloud State University.** M.S. Program in Behavior Analysis from the Department of Applied Psychology

**University of North Texas.** M.A. program in Behavior Analysis from the Center for Behavior Analysis

**Western Michigan University.** M.A. program in Behavior Analysis; Ph.D. programs in Applied Behavior Analysis and in Experimental Analysis of Behavior from the Department of Psychology

## **WHAT ARE SOME GOOD INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS?**

There are a number of outstanding behavior analysis programs around the world, if you've got your language act together or are willing to pay the dues. Here are few I personally know about.

**Keio University, Tokyo, Japan.** Excellent graduate training in the experimental analysis of behavior with some applied work as well.

**Pontifical Catholic University of Sao Paulo, Brazil.** Strong M.A. program in behavior analysis

with a solid background in the philosophy of behaviorism and some applied work. For the last few years, four faculty members and 14 students have come all the way from Brazil to the ABA conference.

**Simon Bolivar University, Caracas, Venezuela.** Excellent M.A. program with an emphasis on applied behavior analysis.

## **WHAT DEGREE SHOULD I GET—B.A., M.A., ED.S., M.S.W., OR PH.D.?**

### **The B.A. Degree<sup>2</sup>**

Behavior analysis may be the only field within psychology where you can actually get a job using what you learned as an undergrad and not end up waiting tables instead. If you get a B.A. with an emphasis on behavior analysis and are willing to move where the job is, you can fairly easily get a job in human services, especially working with the developmentally disabled. In 2002, jobs started at around \$25,000 to \$35,000 annually. I had one B.A. student was pulling down \$45,000 in human services, but that's not typical. In any case, if you have a good background in behavior analysis, you'll probably end up doing what an M.A. normally does. Unfortunately, we only know of two undergrad programs with an emphasis on behavior analysis, WMU and the University of North Texas (they have a separate Behavior Analysis Department, not part of Psychology); but please let us know if there are others and we'll try to get the word out.

### **The M.A., M.S.W., and Ed.S. Degrees**

In some ways, the intermediate-level degrees are the sweet spot, the optimal, most cost-effective applied degrees in human services, education, school psychology, organizational behavior management (OBM or I/O), and social work. And plenty of places are looking for behavior analysts in these areas.

In 2002, M.A. jobs typically started at around \$35,000 to \$55,000 per year with plenty of room for

---

<sup>2</sup> I'm not distinguishing between a B.A. and a B.S. degree, nor an M.A. and an M.S. degree, because I don't think most employers or grad-school admission committees make that distinction. So what I say about the B.A. applies as well to the B.S.; same with M.A. and M.S.

growth. A few started at \$65,000 to \$75,000. One, for a program director started at \$85,000 to \$100,000. I've heard of other M.A. jobs in autism starting at \$100,000, but don't hold your breath. Typically, you will begin by designing programs for clients. After a year or two in human services, you may not be spending most of your time working directly with clients, yourself. Instead, you will be training and supervising those who do. With an MA you might also be able to get a job teaching in a community college.

## **The Ph.D. Degree**

If you're having a great time in grad school (many people are), and if you want to keep having a great time two or three more years, and if you're in perhaps the top 25% on the exams, in your M.A. courses, go for a Ph.D. degree. But, otherwise, don't feel obliged to, because you probably won't need it. With a Ph.D. you'll do all the things an M.A. does, and an M.A. may be your boss. However, you almost have to have a Ph.D. if you want to do research or teach in a four-year college or a university, and that's about as much fun as anything I can think of that they actually pay you to do.

In 2002, there happened to only be two Ph.D. jobs with salary listings posted at ABA (the others didn't have slurrries). One, working with brain-injured clients, started at \$45,000 to \$55,000. The other, a university position started at \$45,000 to \$55,000 for a 9-month year.

## **OBM + Autism = Solution to Hard Times**

One year ago, my students who graduated with an M.A. or Ph.D. with a specialty in organizational behavior management (OBM) were getting good behavior analysis jobs before the ink had dried on their diplomas. But, at the moment (02-04-2002) our economy is in a recession. A couple of these OBM graduates have lost their jobs and my two latest graduates have been searching for a job for at least 6 months. So now they are taking an autism practicum and a few courses in professional psychology so they can get a job in human services. Makes perfect sense to me, because it's all rock and roll to me; it's all behavior analysis, whether you're working with a CEO or an autistic child. With a little extra training or experience, you can easily work in either or both areas (that's one of the

beauties of behavior analysis as a general approach to psychology). And, even though we're in a recession, there are still many, many jobs for behavior analysts working with the mentally handicapped and working with autistic pre-school children. In fact, the autism field is really hot. And, especially with a masters degree, a background in organizational behavior management and behavior systems analysis will set you up to quickly enter a management position in human services, again, especially in developmental disabilities and in autism.

## **Clinical Grad School Warning!**

The programs that are hardest to get into are APA approved, Ph.D. clinical-psychology programs in major universities; they may have several hundred applicants and may admit only a half dozen. For example, I've never known any students to get into the University of Michigan's clinical program, though some applicants have been honors-college graduates with 3.95 GPAs and 1300 composite math and verbal GRE scores!! In 1997, 1068 students applied to the various clinical Ph.D. programs in the state of Michigan; and only 48 got in. So, if you're pretty sure you're among the top 5% of the students applying to Ph.D. clinical programs (not the top 5% graduating with a B.A. degree) go ahead and apply; but in any case, you'd be wise to have a well-developed plan B in your hip pocket, just in case; in other words, you'd be wise to apply to some interesting non-clinical programs, as well.

And things are getting even more difficult for students wanting to get into clinical grad schools. First of all, so many students have become so enamored with Bob Newhart, clinical psychologist, that there is now a glut of Ph.D. clinicians, with many new and even experienced clinicians unemployed or underemployed. Second, with the new emphasis on managed health care and thus a new emphasis on cost-effective "mental-health" intervention programs, the insurance companies, HMOs, and such, are no longer paying \$100+ per hour for as many weeks, months, or years as it needs for the client to resolve his Oedipus complex on the couch of a traditional talk-therapy clinical psychologist. They want quick, effective, inexpensive interventions, often to be provided by M.A. psychologists under the supervision of a Ph.D. psychologist. As a result, the directors of many of

the leading clinical Ph.D. programs have talked about reducing their programs by 50%. So a bad situation is getting even worse for students trying to get into clinical programs. And I'm seeing the results; every year I have one or two outstanding undergrads who apply only to clinical programs and then don't get accepted anywhere. It turns out that this is common nationwide, so that many students spend several years trying to get into a clinical Ph.D. program.

Let me suggest a couple of alternatives: In addition to applying to clinical Ph.D. programs, apply to a few clinical M.A. programs that might be easier to get into, just in case. And/or, in addition to applying to clinical Ph.D. programs, apply to a few behavior analysis programs, just in case. And while you are working on your M.A. degree, you can continue applying to clinical Ph.D. programs if you wish.

Also, there are not nearly as many students who appreciate the intellectual reinforcers of experimental psychology and the experimental analysis of behavior, so it's much easier to get into excellent programs in those areas. Applied behavior analysis is in between those two extremes, but much closer to the experimental end, as are industrial, school psychology, and so forth.

By the way, I think it is easier for M.A. clinicians to get jobs than Ph.D. clinicians; and I think it will be more so, in the future. Also, a few behavior analysis Ph.D. programs train their students in organizational behavior analysis, behavior systems analysis, and staff management, as well as in the skills they will need to work with mental-health clients. I think this sort of training may be exactly what the Ph.D. mental-health worker will need under the new and coming managed health care. A couple of schools that offer that sort of training are Western Michigan University and University of Nevada, Reno. There may be a few others.

## **M.A. JOBS**

I got the following e-mail from Sigrid Glenn, founder and chair of the Behavior Analysis Department at the University of North Texas.

Here are areas from which M.A. graduates from our Behavior Analysis program have received job offers:

- ☞ Designing and supervising the implementation of behavioral programs for developmentally disabled individuals living in the community or in institutions
- ☞ Working with families of abused and neglected children
- ☞ Carrying out in-home programs for children with autism
- ☞ Training and supervising in-home trainers for children with autism
- ☞ Developing performance management systems in business and industry
- ☞ Designing instructional materials for private vendors
- ☞ Designing and implementing behavior management programs in public schools
- ☞ Animal training and management for zoos or recreational facilities.

## **WHERE CAN I FIND A JOB?**

Some suggestions:

- ☞ Drop me an e-mail, and I'll send you the latest list of jobs we know about, assuming we've gotten the list together by that time.
- ☞ Ask the teacher of this course for leads.
- ☞ Go to the ABA convention (they have twice as many jobs as applicants).
- ☞ Get a hold of the ABA Newsletter for behavior analysis job listings.
- ☞ Check ABA's Job Placement Service at <http://www.abainternational.org/start/> It's really cool. (Incidentally, these ABA Web addresses may have changed by the time you read this. But these addresses should contain links to the new sites; if not, just search for Association for Behavior Analysis and take it from there.)

## **Board Certified Behavior Analyst**

Also become a Board Certified Behavior Analyst© (master's degree required), or a Board Certified Associate Behavior Analyst © (bachelor's degree required).

As of 2001, the recognition of certification and subsequently the job market, had greatly increased in a number of states--CA, PA, MA, OK, NY. And certified behavior analysts report that the certificate has been a major help in getting a job even in states that have not formally recognized the certification, because employers are impressed with the national credential.

Check out <http://www.bacb.com/> for the info you'll need.

## HOW DO I GET INTO GRAD SCHOOL?

The two things that screw up students the most are their grades (GPA) and their Graduate Record Exam (GRE) scores. Many schools have a minimum cutoff of 3.0 GPA and 500 Quantitative and 500 Verbal on the GRE. The good news is that not all do (e.g., WMU's Behavior Analysis program has a 400 minimum with a combined minimum score of 900). The bad news is that many have a functional cutoff considerably higher, especially on the GPA, with many applicants having GPAs of 3.5 to 3.8 and even higher.

## What Do I Do About a Low GPA?

Suppose you don't have the GPA you need; not all is lost. In most universities, you can retake courses in which you got low grades and your higher grade will count for your GPA; your lower grades may stay on your record, but not in your GPA. Here's how you do it:

- ☞ First, retake any course, no matter how dumb it was, in which you got a grade lower than a C.
- ☞ Second, retake any psych courses with a grade lower than a B. Get your Psych GPA above a 3.5, if possible, and as close to a 4.0 as you can.
- ☞ Do these things even if you have to delay graduating for a semester or so. (Yes, students really do follow this advice.)
- ☞ Plot a graph of your GPA by semester. If it shows improvement in recent semesters, then include the graph and a brief explanation with your biographic statement in your application.

- ☞ By the way, in some colleges, undergrad courses you take after you graduate can still raise your undergrad GPA.
- ☞ And, even if you can't get your GPA up to where it should be, check out the grad programs anyway—who knows?

## What Do I Do About a Low GRE?

GPA can be a problem, but the GRE usually is a problem. What to do!?

- } First, get a GRE training book from the bookstore and review it briefly.
- } Then take the GRE, either for real or a practice version, like the ones probably in your training book.
- } If you do as well as you need, then take the real version right away (if you haven't); then cross your fingers and wait.
- } But the odds are you didn't do as well as you need. Then go to your bookstore and buy some of the GRE prep manuals and computer programs, and write a performance contract with some real hardass to make sure that you put in the 150 or more hours of self-study you will probably need to significantly raise your GRE scores.

## What Should I Minor In?

Only after you've started on the right GPA and GRE trail should you worry about anything else; all the rest is icing on the cake.

Forget your sociology minors and your communications minors. They seemed like good ideas at the time, I know; but I've never heard a grad school prof complain because a student had a weak background in sociology or public speaking.

What we professors complain about is writing and math skills.

- ☞ So take a practical or technical writing minor (or a bunch of relevant courses if you can't squeeze in the minor).
- ☞ And take math up through college algebra and finite math.
- ☞ Retake all writing and math courses in which you got less than a B.

By the way, the math courses should also help you with the GRE.

Here are some other good minors:

- ☞ General business, especially for those going into OBM (I/O).
- ☞ Depending on your plans, social work might be a good minor; but the odds are it will be completely nonbehavioral or even antibehavioral.
- ☞ And if you're interested in behavioral medicine or experimental analysis of behavior, biology would be good, with physics and chemistry filling in the cracks.
- ☞ Of course other minors might be appropriate, depending on your specific plans, but the preceding would be the best for most behavior analysis careers.
- ☞ Oh yes, also take all the behavior analysis courses you can, as well as psychological statistics and experimental psychology. Take all those courses if you can, but don't put off graduating to do so. They're not as important as your GPA and GRE for getting into grad school.

### **What Experience Should I Get?**

Last and, to some extent, least, go for that practical experience everyone erroneously thinks is more important than the GPA and GRE.

- ☞ Get as many semesters of experience as you can doing applied behavior analysis—odds are it will be with clients labeled developmentally disabled or autistic.
- ☞ And if your professor has a research project going, get involved with that for a few semesters.
- ☞ Also, see if you can help with this course, participating as a teaching apprentice or paper grader.

All this would be good experience, and it will look good on your vita. But what's most important for getting into grad school, boys and girls?

1. Practical experience
2. GREs and GPAs

That's right: GREs and GPAs, even though practical experience is the most fun.

Of course, if you've not yet had much experience with behavior analysis, you may be cautious about committing yourself full tilt to behavior analysis. Many students who have a chance to take a good behavioral practicum or get a part-time behavior modification job find that such experience does the trick. When you find that you can actually help people improve the quality of their lives after you've had just one course in behavior analysis, there's a good chance you'll want to become a professional behavior analyst.

## **THE TIMETABLE**

### **How Long Can I Procrastinate?**

The timetable is important because deadlines will sneak up on you and bite you on the rear when you didn't even know they were there. Many, but not all graduate programs admit new students in the fall only.

#### **May 1, Right After Your Junior Year**

Prepare for the GRE. The most important, though also the most boring, thing you can do with the next 3 or 4 months of your life is to spend 4 hours a day studying for the GRE. No matter how good your scores are, the better, the better. First, you've got to get them high enough that you will be admitted. But then GRE scores can also affect your chances for assistantships and fellowships. Most behavior-analysis programs require only the math and verbal sections, while clinical programs may also require the analytical sections; and clinical and counseling programs may also recommend the psychology section. At this point, I have no info on the writing section. But all things change, so you should check with each grad program, to be sure. You should also check <http://www.gre.org/>. And, not only will improving your math and verbal skills improve your performance on the GRE, also it will probably improve your performance in graduate school and on the job.

#### **June 1, After Your Junior Year**

Find the grad program you want to apply to.



- ☞ Check out ABA's grad school listing at <http://www.wmich.edu/aba/GTD/TrainingDirectoryhome.htm>
- ☞ Check through EPB, and check with your professors.
- ☞ Review your notes from the ABA convention if you had the good fortune of attending between your junior and senior years.

### **July 1, After Your Junior Year**

Contact graduate schools. By phone, email, or snail mail and request information and application forms from all the grad programs you may be interested in. Apply to a wide range of programs (maybe five or six; if you apply to a dozen or two, you'll just irritate your professors who are doing you the favor of writing reference letters for you). Be sure you include one or two grad programs you're sure you will be admitted to, though they are not your first choices.

You might also check <http://www.gre.org/> again, to make sure the following dates will work out in terms of getting things to and from the GRE folks in time.

### **August 1, After Your Junior Year**

Apply for the GRE exam. This may be your last chance to get your application in for the GRE, so that they will have time to get the word to the grad colleges to which you're applying.

At my students' advice, I'm being fairly conservative in terms of these dates, but they say that to be sure of reserving a seat to take the GRE test during prime time (late fall and early winter), you need to do it way in advance. And to be sure the grad school gets your GRE scores in time, you need to allow 5 or 6 weeks instead of the 10 to 15 days the GRE folks suggest.

### **October 1, Your Senior Year**

Take the GRE exam. Sleep well on Friday night and go into the GRE relaxed and calm, even though your whole future depends on the next 6 hours—HA! HA!

But don't slack off on your GRE prep prior to the test. Keep logging in at least a couple of hours a day

of review and fine tuning on the GRE; for example, do speed work because speed saves.

### **November 1, Your Senior Year**

Retake the GRE, if needed. Use this option if your first GRE score sucked and you've been studying hard since then.

### **December 1, Your Senior Year**

Ask your professors to write your letters of recommendation. Don't ask the guy who runs the corner garage and your favorite aunt. Best to ask profs who taught your most relevant psych classes to write letters. And ask the profs who know you best, even if it's just as good old No. 303-99-4569. In other words, ask your teachers for letters, even if you don't have any who know you too well because of the large course sections. Your professors are accustomed to coping with that problem.

Incidentally, it's especially cool if you can give all the recommendation forms, envelopes, etc. to your prof at the same time, so you don't have to keep contacting him or her. And, when you give your prof those forms, include:

- ☞ a photo of yourself
- ☞ a list of the courses you had from that prof
- ☞ along with the dates of those course
- ☞ who the teaching assistants were
- ☞ what grade you got
- ☞ a copy of your university transcript
- ☞ and a copy of the personal or biographical statement you've probably had to write for your grad aps.
- ☞ along with a list of the schools to which you're applying and their deadlines.

### **December 15, Your Senior Year**

Submit your application to the graduate program you're interested in. (I'm assuming that the earliest grad school deadline you have is January 1. But, I understand some clinical programs require a December 1 deadline. However, if your quantitative skills are good enough to pass the GRE, you should be able to adjust these dates to meet the deadlines of the specific schools to which you're applying.)

You will probably need to include a biographical statement—one or two pages max, neat and well written. Just the facts:

- ☞ Relevant experience
- ☞ Relevant courses (point out your serious courses, such as your math and writing courses and your behavior analysis courses)
- ☞ The improvement in your grades (include a graph showing the dramatic rise in your semesterly GPA after your freshman year of booze, dope, and debauchery; but avoid the details of your youthful depravity); don't assume the admissions committee will carefully dig through your transcript in search of your virtues
- ☞ Your professional goals, and why you really want to go to the particular grad program you're applying to—for example, the interests of particular professors, the articles or books they've written that have influenced your decision (name the professors), the details and aspects of the grad program that attract you (the fact that their school is conveniently located and their climate is nice may not impress the admissions committee)

Don't bother telling the committee how great an opinion you have of yourself (e.g., I'm well organized, hard working, brilliant, lovable, sincere, courteous, kind, and humble) because your letters of recommendation should take care of that. Self-promotion of that sort just makes you look like a pompous ass, though you and I know you're really a very humble person.

Also, don't bother explaining to the committee that you are especially prepared to work in human services because you helped your mother overcome her major mental illness and you developed a self-help program to cure your own drug addiction.

### **December 15, Your Senior Year**

Follow up on letters of recommendation. The only people more flaky than college students are college professors. It won't hurt to check with your professors to see how they're doing with your letters, perhaps in the guise of asking if they got your materials OK and then later if they need any more information.

### **December 20, Your Senior Year**

Make sure you've turned in your applications. A few grad schools require that you submit all your application material by January 1—GRE scores, official transcripts, letters of recommendation, everything. Wait until January 2 and you may have to wait a year!!

### **February 1, Your Senior Year**

Your profs always appreciate a little thank you note for your letters of rec.

### **March 1 to April 1, Your Senior Year**

Your profs always appreciate a little progress note letting them know what grad schools accepted you and what one you accepted. But suppose it's disasterville; suppose no grad school accepted you. Don't slit your wrist. Instead call your favorite prof and set up an appointment to figure out where to go from there, like what are your options to frying burgers at the mighty Mac? And you've got a lot of options:

- ☞ Like getting a bachelor's level job in behavior analysis for a year, while you recoup.
- ☞ Like retaking some undergrad courses. There's a good chance, undergrad courses you take, even after you graduate can apply to your undergrad GPA (check with your registrar); otherwise, you might hold off graduating until you get the GPA you need.
- ☞ Like really busting butt on the GRE this time and not like the woosie job you did the last time.
- ☞ Like finding a reasonable MA program that may still have some vacancies.

And, if you don't have a professor who can help you, call me, 'cause Uncle Dickie loves you, even if you didn't have the good sense to go to WMU. No kidding--(269) 372-1268.

### **September 1, Right After You Graduate From College**

Start graduate school. Shouldn't you take a year off and get that valuable, real-world experience? NO! At the end of three years you'd have one year of

BA-level experience and an M.A. degree (optimistically speaking). But suppose you go straight from your B.A. to your M.A. Then, at the end of three years, you'd have an M.A. degree and one year of M.A.-level experience, which would be better experience and would have paid more and would have moved you up the pay scale more than would one year of B.A.-level experience. But more important, most, though not all, students who stop out for a year end up stopping out for a lifetime. Once you've been out in the real world, driving them big cars and smoking them big cigars, it's hard to come back to grad school and peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches. And if you think it's hard going to school now, try it when you've got five kids to support. Stay hungry for another couple of years; grab it while you can.

So that's it. At the end of your junior year, the clock starts ticking, and so do you. Good luck with it all. By the way, you'll love graduate school. Most of your courses will be interesting and relevant and so will your professors. In addition, you will make friendships with fellow grad students that will last the rest of your life. Grad school will probably be the best time of your life.

Oh, yes, you might also check our Behavioral Academic Career Counseling service BACC on the Behavior Analysis Training System (BATS) Web site that my grad students built. BACC might have more job and grad-school info. It's

<http://unix.cc.wmich.edu/~malott/>

Drop me an e-mail at:

DickMalott@DickMalott.com

Tell me how it went, how it's going, and how it's going to go; let me know if I can help in any way. And remember:

