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Applying to Berkeley

There are two main paths to join the Cognition and Action Lab (CognAc) for graduate study, and in general, for applying to graduate programs in cognitive neuroscience at Berkeley

- 1) via the Department of Psychology, specifying the Cognitive Neuroscience subarea
- 2) via the Helen Wills Neuroscience Institute Graduate Program in Neuroscience

You should check out the websites for the programs to see which matches your interests best. CognAc faculty are affiliated with both and students join their labs through all three programs. You can only apply to one program. In some cases, an applicant may be asked if they are willing to allow their application to be shifted from one program to another. This has usually happened when someone is not selected by Neuro and a Psych faculty member shifts the application to Psychology.

Some students also enter through the Vision Sciences and joint UCSF-UCB Bio-engineering graduate program

Main differences between Psych and Neuroscience are:

-- curriculum.

Neuroscience will require some coursework on basic neurosciences and biology (e.g., genetics, molecular and cellular neuroscience).

Psychology coursework focuses on cognitive psychology and cognitive neuroscience. Students frequently supplement this with some basic neuroscience or neuroanatomy.

-- lab affiliation

Neuroscience students do a 3-lab rotation during 1st year and then affiliate with one lab from 2nd year onward.

Psychology students typically join a lab upon arrival and complete 1st year project in that lab. They usually continue in that lab for future years (although some students change to a different primary lab). There are no obligations to stay in a lab-- it's just that students tend to be happy with where they start.

-- admissions

Neuroscience operates with Admissions Committee. This committee reviews all applications and makes invitations to prospective students for interviews and campus visits. Unless I am on the committee, my involvement typically starts after the invitation process.

Psychology allows all faculty to review applications and nominate candidates to be invited for interviews and campus visits. Thus, my involvement here starts before invitation process.

-- funding: All grads receive coverage of their tuition and fees (including health insurance).

This will be included in your research assistantship, teaching assistantship, or fellowship. You are also given a stipend, the money that will support your housing and living costs.

Neuroscience: At present, the program has a large training grant that provides support for all grad students during their first two years. During that time, the students are likely to serve as grad student instructors (GSIs) for two semesters. Faculty commit to provide support for students

working in their lab during the remaining two years (assuming 5.5 year program). The annual stipend for these programs is around \$37,500/year.

Psychology: Psych doesn't have a training grant so support is individually negotiated by sponsoring faculty member. Department guarantees five years of support, with most of guarantee based on GSIs and summer funding. There is one semester of Dept funding. However, many faculty, including me, use grant funds to hire students as RAs and provide additional support. Currently, the Department's guaranteed level of funding is around \$30,000 (under review). I have set minimum for students in my lab at \$35,000, and may go up to Neuro level depending on availability of funds.

IMPORTANT NOTE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: Psychology is limited in their ability to provide support for foreign students because of the high tuition costs for non-USA residents. Individual faculty must pledge to cover these costs so this should be discussed with me in advance. The Neurosci program has some funds to cover foreign-student tuition

All graduate students working under my direction are welcome to work in multiple labs (you essentially "vote with your feet", meaning if you have time/energy, you can develop multiple, independent projects). Graduate students sometimes work across labs, providing the links to develop new collaborations. My lab also collaborates with researchers scattered about the world.

Overview of successful applications. I have not served on the Neuro admissions committee, but know they seek a balance of recruits across the various areas of their programs.

There is no set formula for our successful applicants-- they have very diverse backgrounds.

I do like to see solid grades. Having some research experience is a big plus and would say that in depth (multiple semester) research work in one lab is more important than working briefly in a few different labs. The experience usually allows people to write stronger statements and provide more detail in the letter of recommendation.

Admissions to Psychology tends to be heavily based on individual faculty recommendations/preferences rather than based on some standing committee. As such, reading over faculty profiles and contacting professors directly (via email) in advance of your application is a very good idea. This is a good way to find out if there will be openings and establish a rapport with a possible advisor. Doesn't mean that you are committed to that lab but it does help to have a faculty advocate at the time decisions are made.

Because of large number of requests, I usually hold off on interviews/meetings before an applicant is selected to come to Berkeley as part of our Visitors' Day. Invites typically go out in mid-January with visits in February.

In terms of current interests, please see our most recent publications on the lab website. This provides a sample of the work we are engaged in.

Rich Ivry