Information for Prospective Graduate Students
The Hinojosa Laboratory

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Why did you make this document?

Given the rigorous application process, I borrowed this idea heavily from Dr. Cassandra Boness and Dr. Craig Rodriguez-Seijas to increase transparency about the clinical psychology PhD application process. I must disclose that I am ***not*** a clinical psychologist by training; I am a clinical neuroscientist. As a UNM faculty, I can mentor a clinical psychology graduate student with a clinical faculty as a co-mentor. I primarily mentor Cognition, Brain & Behavior (CBB) graduate students. Given that Drs. Boness and Rodriguez-Seijas are trained as clinical psychologists, I highly recommend you visit their websites for more resources regarding the application process.

Please also note that the information I provide in this document reflects *only my personal opinions*. They may not apply to other faculty members at the University of New Mexico (UNM) or any other faculty in clinical psychology outside of UNM.

Will you be accepting a new Ph.D. student to begin in Fall 2025?

Yes! I will be reviewing applications and interviewing prospective students to matriculate in Fall 2025. I will be accepting ONE graduate student.

How do I know whether I am a "good fit" for The Hinojosa Laboratory?

When reviewing applications, I am most interested in the goodness of fit between myself and an applicant with respect to (1) the applicant's interests, experiences, and goals, and (2) the lab's mission, research focus, and my own strengths and weaknesses as a mentor.

Overall, an applicant who would likely be a "good fit" would...

- **Demonstrate commitment to The Hinojosa Laboratory Mission.** Our research seeks to be continuously oriented towards reducing suffering and improving quality of life among those with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and/or alcohol use disorder (AUD). The Hinojosa Laboratory studies neural mechanisms that cause and maintain AUD/PTSD in vulnerable populations. We seek to use the resulting information to develop or improve upon *treatments for this co-occurrence* in vulnerable populations, including women and racial/ethnic minorities. Our team is passionate about person-centered approaches, harm reduction, and co-producing knowledge alongside people with lived experience with addiction and trauma. 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 research** with a focus on topics such as understanding the factors that cause and maintain PTSD and/or AUD, improving the measurement and assessment of PTSD/AUD and related constructs, and improving treatment outcomes for PTSD/AUD, particularly through person-centered approaches such as precision medicine.
    - *Please note*: You do not have to be interested in all these things to be a good fit with The Hinojosa Laboratory! I am most enthusiastic about applicants who have some overlapping interests with me, but who *also* have ideas for how they can expand upon these interests and take the lab's research in new (but related) directions.
    - As a mentor, I feel most prepared to support students who are interested in careers that involve research. This includes a wide variety of career paths, such as academic faculty positions (e.g., in psychology, counseling, education, sociology, social work, or public health departments); combined clinical-research careers (e.g., in academic medical centers); and non-academic careers in applied research or health policy.
    - I am not the most effective mentor for applicants who are interested solely in clinical practice careers. There will be expectations of strong research productivity throughout graduate school as a member of The Hinojosa Laboratory, including a thesis, comprehensive exams, and dissertation. Therefore, if your interest is primarily in learning the skills to become an effective clinical, then my mentorship will not be the best for you.
- **Have a desire to work with community members** of Albuquerque, especially those who have lived experience with trauma and addiction.
- **Have an interest in learning neuroimaging and neuromodulation** methods and techniques.
- **Have independent research experience** (e.g., leading a senior thesis or research project; having first-authored posters, talks, or papers).
    - *Please note*: Access to mentors who can facilitate and support independent research experience is itself a form of privilege. The graduate school application process is very competitive. However, relevant situational factors well beyond your control (such as a lack of relevant mentorship, lack of environmental factors to facilitate learning, etc.) that impact your record of independent research experience. In my case, I am a first-generation college student, I had no knowledge of having to conduct research to be competitive for graduate school programs, and no faculty at my undergraduate institution did research on PTSD. Given these considerations, I aim to judge applications holistically. If you believe that your research experience does not reflect your potential as a future scientist, please (1) ask one or more of your recommenders to share more about your circumstances to help me holistically assess your achievements, and/or (2) provide this information in your personal statement.
- **Have a passion for conducting research.** Completing a PhD is ***HARD***! You need to be passionate about your research to get through it. One major criterion I use to determine if you will be a good fit for the lab is whether you love the science we conduct as much as I do.

What about the GRE? How important are my scores?

The University of New Mexico does NOT accept or review GRE scores.

My undergraduate grade point average (GPA) is below 3.5. Will this remove me from consideration?

No. Many factors can and do influence a person's GPA, including competing commitments (e.g., working part-time), family obligations (e.g., caring for dependents or aging parents), and health challenges (e.g., having a disability). Although I hold academic achievement as an important criterion for admission, I consider it on an individual basis alongside other important contextual information (when provided with it). Further, academic achievement can be demonstrated in a variety of ways beyond GPA. If you believe your GPA does not reflect your potential as a future scientist, please (1) ask one or more of your letter writers to share more about your circumstances and other indicators of your academic achievement to help me holistically assess your achievements, and/or (2) provide this information in your personal statement.

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

No. I focus on the evaluation of the standard application materials. I will 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?

You are welcome to email me expressing interest (cahinojosa@unm.edu), but it is not required. If you do email me, I may not reply, and if I do, I will likely point you to the UNM and The Hinojosa Laboratory websites as well as this document using a standard email template. I do this for two reasons.

1. I find that this document typically answers most questions that applicants have for me about my mentorship approach, The Hinojosa Laboratory's program of research, and The Hinojosa Lab's culture and values.
2. It ensures fairness across the information provided to applicants.

If for some reason you find that your questions are not addressed by the UNM and The Hinojosa Laboratory websites or this document, please get in touch and I will do my best to address them.

Please note that I will not be discussing specific collaborations or research projects at this time. These types of discussions typically occur during invited interviews.

What should I include in my personal statement?

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

1. A clear statement of your general research interests and how they relate to The Hinojosa Laboratory's mission and work. *You do not need to share all my interests! In fact, I am particularly interested in how you might extend our current research in new directions or to new topics. But you MUST be passionate about the research conducted and helping individuals from vulnerable populations.*
2. A clear statement of why you are interested in UNM and The Hinojosa Laboratory in particular
3. A statement about your current career goals - When you picture your career after getting your PhD, in what environment do you see yourself? What research topics do you think

you will focus on? Why am I the right person to train you to achieve your career goals? (*Your goals will likely change over time, but it is helpful to see your thinking right now!*)
4. Discussions of your <u>independent research experience(s)</u> and <u>what you learned</u> from them. In these discussions, I suggest emphasizing...
    a. The skills you developed from working on each project (*e.g., data collection in Qualtrics; coding/running analyses; interviewing skills; writing certain sections of a paper; submitting/presenting a poster*)
    b. How these experiences informed your current interests and career path, and/or how these experiences prepared you to be successful in graduate school and in our program specifically
    c. What your "takeaways" were from the project (*e.g., new research ideas or questions your work inspired*)
5. A discussion of <u>any perceived weaknesses within your application</u>, as well as...
    a. Relevant contextual factors that might help me evaluate you holistically, and
    b. Other accomplishments or skills that make up for these perceived weaknesses/demonstrate your achievements and preparedness for graduate school.

What to AVOID in Personal Statements

1. You have limited space in your personal statement. Thus, I suggest avoiding long, detailed stories about how you came to be interested in psychology. Rather than focusing on introductory stories of how you came to this field, spend more time instead unpacking your critical scientific thinking and how this relates to working under my mentorship.
2. **Show, don't tell!** Don't just tell me that I can mentor you. Illustrate it with some examples of how you think my research and clinical skills can help you get where you want to be.
3. Try to avoid repetition with other application materials. This isn't a place to reiterate what is on your CV. Rather, it's your chance to tie it all together, show critical thinking skills, and demonstrate *HOW* you're a good fit. This does not mean you shouldn't still highlight key achievements and important experiences in your statement. It just means I do not need you to walk me through every section of your CV in the personal statement (I promise I will read both your CV and your personal statement!).

A few final notes on the personal statement...

Get as much feedback as you can before submitting. It can sometimes feel challenging to write about yourself, but it is important that you do not over-sell *nor* under-sell your accomplishments. Getting feedback from others can ensure you're striking the right balance when sharing your achievements.

Talk to your mentors, professors, peers, friends, and family. Having access to mentors who can help you refine your personal statements is very helpful, but it is also a privilege that might not be equally available to all. There are many other options!

o Look into resources at your undergraduate institutions that can help (open writing workshops, career centers, etc.) or organizations like Project SHORT.

- Also, consult this spreadsheet with various academics who may be willing to help field questions and look over application materials, particularly for students whose backgrounds are underrepresented in psychology.

Some additional resources...

- A wonderful resource from Dr. Rodriguez-Seijas – includes a few annotated examples of graduate school personal statements with commentary
- Dr. Noah Emery's resource on crafting an effective personal statement
- A candid episode of the Clinically Psyched podcast – Dr. Rodriguez-Seijas talks about the complexities of going through student applications (**we might not use the same criteria to evaluate fit, but I still suggest giving it a listen.*)

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

NO. I am most interested in applicants seeking rigorous training in both research and clinical practice. Both skill sets inform each other necessarily. Though, as noted elsewhere, I am best equipped to mentor applicants who want a career involving some degree of research (as opposed to solely clinical careers).

The University of New Mexico's clinical psychology program has a strong clinical science orientation. This means our training program has been designed to reflect the integration of science and practice across all aspects of training. Students who are happiest in our program tend to want careers that incorporate research in some way.

My own experiences with addiction and/or trauma (e.g., my own, a friend's, or a relative's) shaped my current interests. I have been told NOT to mention this in my personal statement. Is this true?

Speaking only for myself, no. I recognize that our life experiences shape our training opportunities as well as career interests, trajectories, and goals in meaningful ways. There is nothing wrong with acknowledging intersections between our 'human' and 'scientific' selves.

However, personal stories and lived experiences should not be the focus of your personal statement. As I mentioned before, I suggest avoiding long, detailed stories in your application. Your research interests, experiences, goals, and 'fit' to our lab are much more helpful to me when reviewing your application.

What is your mentorship style?

As a mentor, I aim to help my mentees (i.e., undergraduate and graduate students and post-doctoral trainees) reach their career goals. To do this, I will continuously work to accept differing opinions and will strive to learn from my mentees. I will provide a positive laboratory environment where my mentees feel safe and comfortable with each other and me and embrace discussions of diversity, equity, and inclusion for the research group. I value enthusiasm for the research conducted (or at least for the skills learned through the work conducted), creativity, open discussions, **dedication**, and **hard work**. I will share my experiences with my mentees to provide guidance when appropriate. I will promote a group share dynamic where all teammates will feel comfortable working together and sharing the knowledge they have

learned with others. I will help tailor my mentees' projects or assignments to meet their individual goals while supporting the broader goals of our entire research team. I will create an individualized mentoring compact for each mentee to ensure we are all on the same page with our relationship. I will provide a yearly evaluation to each mentee to assess career development and research progress. I will use all the resources available to provide optimal opportunities for my trainees. By the end of their training experience, it is my hope that my mentees will have gained confidence and independence and the ability to perform high-quality research with rigor and reproducibility, along with strong communication and leadership skills.

I have never had to write a CV before. Where do I start? How should I organize this document?

When I review applicants' CVs, I am most interested in the following categories:

- o Honors and Awards, Grants, Publications, Presentations (*including those that are in prep, submitted, or under review*)
- o Research experience
- o Clinical experience
- o Teaching experience
- o Relevant coursework

Here are some good resources on writing a CV:

- o "How to Write a Strong CV" – Association of Psychological Science
- o Example CV for clinical psychology applicants – University of Nebraska, Lincoln

Are there any other resources/information/guidance about the application process you suggest?

Yes! Here is a list of a few more (very helpful) resources.

- o Mitch's Uncensored Advice for Applying to Graduate School in Clinical Psychology – Dr. Mitch Prinstein, UNC Chapel Hill. This is a STAPLE for those considering applying to graduate school in clinical psychology and discusses everything from determining your best-fit career path to deciding between offers from Clinical PhD programs!
- o Getting Into Psych Grad School – by the Council of University Directors in Clinical Psychology (CUDCP). This is a fantastic guide from Directors of Clinical Training at Clinical Psychology PhD programs from across the country.
- o Open Access Tips/Materials for Clinical Psych PhD Applicants – a *fantastic* resource compiled by Mallory Dobias, B.S., a PhD student in Dr. Jessica Schleider's lab. This is a collection of open-access pointers, timelines, and materials, and includes sample e-mails, prospective advisors, 'before and after' personal statements, and more!
- o So You Want to Go to Clinical Psych Grad School? ...Or Something? – Slides from a lecture prepared by Dr. Jessica Schleider on considering careers in clinical psychology and allied disciplines. This includes information about different career options and degrees, preparing to apply for PhD programs, and how to obtain research and clinical experience.
- o Deciding to apply to Clinical Psychology Ph.D. programs – a blog post written with particular focus on tailoring advice to students/applicants of color, low-income students/applicants, and first-generation students/applicants.

- Your Guide to Getting into Clinical Psych Graduate School – another collection of resources from the Council of University Directors of Clinical Psychology (CUDCP).
- Mote Lab Clinical Psychology Ph.D. Tip Sheet – an extensive guide to the clinical psychology PhD application process from Dr. Jasmine Mote. This document also includes a sample personal statement, diversity statement, and CV.