

# The Curriculum Vita: A Student's Guide to Preparation

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## Introduction

Undergraduate psychology majors with aspirations toward graduate school have a number of preparations to make. It is well known by now that the top factors that influence graduate school admissions are grade point average (GPA), Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores, letters of recommendation (Keith-Spiegel & Wiederman, 2000), research experience, and autobiographical statements (Landrum, Jeglum, & Cashin, 1994). Previous issues of *Eye on Psi Chi* (accessible at [www.psichi.org](http://www.psichi.org)) contain valuable guides on many aspects of the graduate school application process (Buskist, 2001; Dirlam, 1998; Lammers, 2000; Terre, 2002), including specific articles on the GRE (Matlin & Kalat, 2001; Norcross, 1997a; Walfish, 2004), writing a personal statement (Bottoms & Nysse, 1999; Osborne, 1996), the importance of transcripts (Appleby, 2003), earning strong letters of recommendation (Arnold & Horrigan, 2003), the odds of graduate admissions (Landrum, 2004), and application fees and deadlines (Norcross, 1997b). Although some guidance does exist on preparation



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around the study of and understanding of educational issues and identifying those conditions that best facilitate student learning. He has made over 180 professional presentations at conferences and published over 50 books, book chapters, or professional articles in scholarly, peer-reviewed journals. He is the coeditor and author of two chapters in *Protecting Human Subjects: Departmental Subject Pools and Institutional Review Boards* (1999, APA Books) and lead author of *The Psychology Major: Career Options and Strategies for Success* (2nd ed., 2004, Prentice Hall). He is a member of the American Psychological Association (Fellow, Division 2), the Midwestern Psychological Association, and the Rocky Mountain Psychological Association.

of the curriculum vita (Hayes & Hayes, 1989; Plous, 1998), this article focuses on advice to students in CV preparation and includes a sample student CV.

What is a curriculum vita (CV)? Roughly translated, it means “academic life.” A CV chronicles your professional, academic life: it is a comprehensive listing of your accomplishments. The preparation of a CV differs in important ways from the preparation of a resume. For instance, a resume usually provides a brief synopsis of a person’s work history and a summary of skills and abilities. Also, a resume is typically limited to one or two pages. A CV can be a longer document without page limitations. The CV tracks your entire professional and academic history, including academic performance, memberships in associations, professional experiences, research interests, presentations and publications, and references. Students and faculty members alike try to “grow” their vita — in other words, the longer the better. However, students need to be careful not to pad their vita with irrelevant materials. Additionally, the vita of a faculty member may not be the best model for students to follow — more on this later. This article includes a sample template vita that students can follow in the creation of their own CV.

Many of the suggestions in the preparation of a CV follow along the same guidelines for the preparation of a resume. For instance, your CV should be clear and concise; presented in an inviting and organized format, it must be absolutely perfect regarding spelling, grammar, and punctuation; and it needs to be tailored to the task — in this case, a graduate school application. Hayes and Hayes (1989) provided valuable advice for students in the preparation of a CV. For instance, they suggested that you create your vita now, even if there is not much on it. When my students do this as a class assignment, it can become a motivator to work hard to fill in the blanks, and eventually grow the CV page by page. Also, you should keep a vita development file which helps to keep track of

your accomplishments. By keeping a folder where you store everything, when it is time to revise your CV, all the documentation is in one place.

Revise your vita frequently, perhaps monthly or semi-annually. Personally, when something good happens to me and deserves to be put on my CV, I update my CV that day. It has become a positive reinforcer to me and is tangible evidence of an accomplishment. Finally, have your advisor or mentor review your vita before sending it anywhere, just as you would have others review a resume. This document needs to be as perfect as possible — it is a representation of you and your skills, abilities, and achievements.

## Sections of the CV

There is no universal format for the preparation of a CV and everyone has his or her format preferences. However, similar to resumes, there are some sections of a CV that are fairly common. The sections of a student CV are recommended below and demonstrated in Figure 1. For your first draft of your CV, I suggest that you follow this format. Faculty CVs are not the best models to follow for students in preparing a CV. Why? Because faculty members have additional responsibilities and opportunities for building their academic credentials compared to students. For instance, most students would not need a section on their CV for Textbooks Written, Book Chapters, Journal Reviewer/Referee, Program Reviews, or Grants Received; however, these are all sections of my vita. I recommend that students review the vita of other, senior-level students at their university, review sample vitae found in other resources (Landrum & Davis, 2003), or by using the example presented in Figure 1. This is a more appropriate template for potential student achievement. Below are brief descriptions of the major sections of your CV.

**1) Contact Information.** Display your name at the top of your CV in large letters. Include your current contact information: mailing address, email

## Cire Murdnal

270 Market Street  
Boise, ID 83716  
Phone: (208) 555-1212  
Email: cmurdnal@hotmail.com

### Education

Boise State University  
Bachelor's of Science in Psychology (Anticipated May 2005); Minor in Sociology  
Current GPA: 3.75/4.00 scale  
Psychology GPA: 4.00  
Last 2 Years' GPA: 3.92

### Professional Experience

- Fall 2004-Spring 2005     Research Assistant, Community Improvement Program  
Supervisor: Dr. T. Smith  
Duties: Conducted focus groups with community members; entered and analyzed data using SPSS; prepared findings conference submission
- Fall 2004-Spring 2005     Research Assistant, Grade Inflation Project  
Supervisor: Dr. E. Jones  
Duties: Coded archival data using content analysis techniques; supervised other students as lab manager; submitted results to conference as oral presentation
- Summer 2004                Internship, Idaho Neurological Institute  
Supervisor: Dr. P. Taylor  
Duties: Worked with families for community intervention project; assisted therapist in conducting group therapy sessions
- Spring 2004                Teaching Assistant, PSYC 321 Research Methods  
Supervisor: Dr. M. Johnson  
Duties: Attended class, held office hours, graded papers, organized review sessions for students
- Fall 2003                    Tutor, Supplemental Instruction Program  
Supervisor: Ms. L. Baker  
Duties: Conducted review sections for students enrolled in targeted classes; prepared educational materials to help students study

### Presentations

Murdnal, C., & Rosenkranz, M. (2004, May). *The role of grade inflation on student performance*. Paper presented at the meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association, Chicago.

Landrum, R. E., & Murdnal, C. (2003, April). *When the spelling of a name is reversed: Does anyone notice?* Poster presented at the meeting of the Rocky Mountain Psychological Association, Reno, NV.

### Publication

Smith, T., & Murdnal, C. (2004). Assigning the appropriate (high) value to teaching. *College Student Journal*, 49, 521-529.

### Manuscript in Preparation

Murdnal, C. (2005). *Student views on the balance between teaching and research*. Manuscript in preparation.

### Honors, Awards, and Memberships

- Recipient, Psychology Department Scholarship, Fall 2004  
Member, Dean's List (Every semester, Spring 2003-present)  
Member, Psi Chi (The National Honor Society in Psychology), Fall 2003-Chapter President, Fall 2004-Chapter Treasurer, Spring 2004  
Member, Phi Kappa Phi (National Honor Society), Spring 2004-Student Member, Rocky Mountain Psychological Association, Spring 2003-Student Affiliate, American Psychological Association, Fall 2004-

### References

- Dr. Tim Smith, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Boise State University  
Email: tsmith@boisestate.edu     Phone: (208) 555-2121
- Dr. Earl Jones, Professor, Department of Psychology, Boise State University  
Email: ejones@boisestate.edu     Phone: (208) 555-2222
- Dr. Peggy Taylor, Clinical Director, Idaho Neurological Institute  
Email: ptaylor@ini.org                Phone: (208) 555-2323

Figure 1: A sample student curriculum vita (CV)

address, telephone number, and fax number, if applicable. Be sure that your answering machine message is professional sounding, and that your email address is not cutesy (not *flirtygirl@hotmail.com* or *hottiedude@yahoo.com*). Avoid giving a cell phone number as your telephone number. If you get a call from a graduate admissions committee member, you'll want absolute clarity and to be in an environment with minimal distractions.

**2) Educational History.** Recount your educational history here, starting from the beginning. That is, if you transferred to your current school, list your schools in order starting from the first school attended with dates (if there is a gap in your education, you'll have a chance to explain that in your cover letter). State the degree you have earned (or are about to earn): a bachelor of arts or bachelor of science degree. If you have not yet graduated, make this clear — state that your graduation date is “expected” or “anti-

pated.” Always remember to be fair with the data and don't claim to have a degree that you have not yet earned. Also, state your cumulative GPA. If your school requests it, you might list your GPA in psychology and your last two years' GPA.

**3) Professional Experience.** Here, you want to list any academic or employment experiences that are directly related to your graduate school aspirations. If you were a teaching assistant or research assistant, list each of those experiences here. If you had any jobs that are psychology-related, you can list them here. If you are unsure if you should include a particular job, consult with a trusted faculty member. For each experience, list the supervisor, dates of participation, and a brief description of the job duties performed (these brief descriptions do not need to be complete sentences).

**4) Presentations and Publications.** This is a section where it is particularly important to be fair with the data. If you have only conference presentations, then

only use the heading “Presentations.” If you have both presentations and publications, list them separately under two categories. A common mistake (one made even by graduate students applying for faculty positions) is to “hide” lack of achievement in one category by grouping both of these categories together. Present your presentations and publications using APA format, except use single-spacing. If a presentation or publication is submitted but not yet accepted, say so. Papers that are “in preparation” or “in progress” need to be clearly labeled as such—resist all effort to pad your CV in any area.

**5) Honors, Awards, and Memberships.** In this section, list any academic honors and awards you have earned including Dean's List, scholarships, and other awards. Also, if you are a member of Psi Chi, list that here! If you have served in a leadership role for any campus organizations, be sure to list that. If you have joined any regional psychology associations, list your student memberships here. ▶ 42

## Purpose, Mission Of Psi Chi—< 23

supervises an undergraduate, or a graduate student, on a research project, one is teaching. And when one teaches, one draws heavily upon research to support conclusions. Research and teaching are inseparable.

### Conclusions

The purpose and mission statements of Psi Chi, the National Honor Society in Psychology, lead to two important activities: supporting and recognizing scholarship and advancing the science of psychology. Ruth Cousins and the National Council focused on the first activity and ensured the Society's financial stability. Kay Wilson and the National Council developed strong programs to advance the science of psychology, primarily through programs that provide opportunities and recognition for undergraduate research. Student responses to the questionnaire show that

learning to conduct research offers several major advantages. Students acquire a better understanding of the scientific method particularly as it relates to the methods of science commonly used in psychology. Students learn to design better experiments and to determine the controls necessary to establish cause and effect relationships. In addition, students become better consumers of information and they learn to think critically and creatively. By conducting research and by presenting and publishing their work, students become more competitive in a tight graduate school market and they are able to contribute to such programs earlier. The experience also allows a faculty member or a research supervisor to know the student well. This result has obvious benefits when it is time to write letters of recommendation.

Through their involvement in research, students are transformed from passive to active learners who are empowered to continue their education at the graduate level. Given the positive impact that con-

ducting research has on the student and on the faculty advisor, it is proposed that administrators find ways to reward or compensate faculty members who engage in such activity. One way to do this is by providing course credit for faculty members willing to invest the time necessary to ensure a positive experience for the student. The payoff to the student and to the faculty member is immeasurable. ☞

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**6) References.** Here, you should list at least three references who can speak to your academic skills and abilities. In general, this should be at least two psychology faculty members. You can also include one internship supervisor or one job supervisor (as long as your job is psychology-related). If you are a transfer student, limit yourself to only one reference from your former institution. Make sure you have asked the faculty for permission to list them as a reference, and let them know when your graduate school materials are being sent (more than likely, these are your letters of recommendation writers as well).

### Conclusions

It is not necessary to follow this format precisely, but the above sections should act as an overview for what can be included in a student CV. Be sure to consult with your mentor or other trusted faculty members for advice on what to include on your CV, and for formatting tips. Additionally, make sure that multiple people proofread your CV for you; it must be absolutely perfect before being sent anywhere. Fairly or unfairly, your CV is a representation of you. If this document is prepared in a sloppy and unprofessional manner, you will be perceived as sloppy and unprofessional. Figure 1 should be particularly helpful in

giving you ideas on how to prepare your own CV. If you create your first draft of your CV and it seems a bit short, don't worry—use that observation as a motivator to get more involved outside the classroom, whether as a teaching or research assistant, Psi Chi, member intern, or by some other means.

The most important thing to remember is to be fair with the data. Don't say that you've done something that you haven't. Don't say that a manuscript is in press when really it is only submitted. Your reputation and integrity are of utmost value and once damaged, they are hard to repair. Following the advice in this article should lead you to the creation of a valuable and important document. If you don't have a CV, start yours now! ☞

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