

Application Resource Tool

University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) PhD Program in Applied Behavior Analysis

Welcome to the ABA PhD program application process at the University of Nebraska Medical Center! This tool is intended to maximize the transparency of our review process and assist you in preparing a top-scoring application.

How should I get started?

- Review our [PhD program website](#) for details on:
 - Admissions process (see deadlines, ensure you are eligible for admissions, and review requirements)
 - Curriculum (review the general course requirements and specific course offerings)
 - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ; see answers to questions we commonly receive from applicants to our program)
 - Program information (review general program requirements, learn how to schedule an in-person tour, and learn how to RSVP to our next virtual open house)
 - Faculty (read professional summaries and learn about faculty interests to select potential faculty mentors that match your interests)
- Watch our [video tour](#) of the Munroe-Meyer Institute, the setting of our PhD program.

What does the review committee look for in an applicant?

- The committee adopts a holistic review process that considers the applicant's demonstration from among a variety of **knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs)** relevant to success in the program. Summarized below, these KSAOs were developed in consultation with faculty and students.

KSAO Table

Clinical Aptitude	
Knowledge of Discipline	Professional behavior
BCBA eligible	Collaborative skills
Research Aptitude	
Critical thinking	Research implementation skills
Time management	Communication skills (written)
Leadership Aptitude	
Teaching/mentorship	Communication skills (oral)
Service	Community engagement
Work Ethic	
Responsiveness to feedback	Flexibility
Resilience	Determination
Compassion	

Empathy	Inclusivity
Listening Skills	Helpfulness

- Throughout the application process, we encourage applicants to highlight the particular KSAOs they feel they demonstrate to an exceptional or above average level. We seek to build a cohort of students who, at minimum, demonstrate average competency across all KSAO categories, and optimally, display above average or exceptional levels in some categories. We do not expect all applicants to demonstrate above average or exceptional levels of every KSAO on the list, but rather, seek to build a cohort of students with complementary talents.

How am I rated among other applicants?

- Multiple faculty raters will score applications and interviews.
- For each rater, the applicant will receive a single score (1-5; see rubrics below) on:
 - Personal statement
 - Diversity statement
 - Letters of recommendation (each scored separately)
 - Overall application (inclusive of transcripts, CV, etc.)
- Collectively, these scores will determine eligibility for an interview with the committee.
- Raters will also determine a single score (1-5) for each applicant's interview.
- Determination of an offer will be based on:
 - Rankings among applicants' scores on applications and interviews
 - Match with faculty advisor (i.e., you will be asked to rank potential faculty advisors, and offers to the program will be contingent on faculty identifying a match between applicant and faculty advisor)
 - Availability of funding (i.e., we provide full tuition support plus a stipend for all PhD students; annual funding availability will dictate the total number of students we may accept into the program)

Personal Statement Prompt Rubric

Score	Label	Description
1	Exceptional	Answers display KSAOs consistently; provides clear evidence for potential for success and personal fulfillment in this graduate program
2	Above average	Answers display KSAOs more than half the time; provides good evidence for potential for success and personal fulfillment in this graduate program
3	Average	Answers display KSAOs about half the time; provides some evidence for potential for success and personal fulfillment in this graduate program
4	Below Average	Answers occasionally display KSAOs; provides unclear evidence for potential for success and personal fulfillment in this graduate program
5	Poor	Answers minimally display KSAOs, contains red flags, and/or provides limited evidence for potential for success and personal fulfillment in this graduate program

Recommendation Rating Form rubric

Score	Label	Description
1	Exceptional	Rater indicates exceptional performance (i.e., score of 1) in their overall recommendation and provides clear evidence for rating in letter when describing the applicant's strengths

2	Above average	Rater indicates above average performance (i.e., score of 2) in their overall recommendation and provides clear evidence for rating in letter when describing the applicant's strengths
3	Average	Rater indicates average performance (i.e., score of 3) in their overall recommendation and provides evidence in letter when describing the applicant's strengths
4	Below Average	Rater indicates below average performance (i.e., score of 4) in their overall recommendation with or without evidence in letter when describing the applicant's strengths
5	Poor	Rater indicates poor performance (i.e., score of 5) in their overall recommendation with or without evidence in letter when describing the applicant's strengths

Overall Application/Interview rubric

Score	Label	Description
1	Exceptional	Overall application/interview was within top 10% of PHD applicants you have ever reviewed
2	Above average	Overall application/interview was within top 25% of PHD applicants you have ever reviewed
3	Average	Overall application/interview was within top 50% of PHD applicants you have ever reviewed
4	Below Average	Overall application/interview was within bottom 25% of PHD applicants you have ever reviewed
5	Poor	Overall application/interview was within bottom 10% of PHD applicants you have ever reviewed

Do you have any resources to help me assemble the best application possible?

Yes! We have assembled our top tips and summarized them briefly below. We also offer Zoom Open House events annually to answer additional questions you may have. Please check our website for details and registration links to the [Zoom Open House events](#).

Personal statement

- In lieu of a traditional personal statement, our program has adopted a series of open-ended questions that are directly aligned with our KSAOs. We hope this format helps guide you on exactly the type of information we are seeking to evaluate you as a candidate of the program.
- Generally, answers to the personal statement prompts should convince the rater that you will be **successful** and **personally fulfilled** in our PhD program.
 - To demonstrate potential for **success**: Highlight the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs) listed in the table above or other KSAOs that you feel will contribute to your success in the program. Use specific examples to validate your self-assessment. For example, instead of stating that you are knowledgeable about the discipline, show *how* you are knowledgeable by summarizing your academic, scholarly, community, and/or employment experiences in applied behavior analysis. Instead of stating that you are a compassionate person, provide an example of *how* you learned to demonstrate compassion to your clients, peers, supervisors, etc. and *why* your compassionate nature has led to you pursue a PhD in applied behavior analysis.

- To demonstrate potential for **personal fulfillment**: Describe your goals, interests, and values. Show explicit alignment between these goals and: (a) a doctoral degree, generally, and (b) the University of Nebraska Medical Center's ABA PhD program.
- If there is a particular mentor or mentors who you are interested in working alongside, feel free to mention them by name.
- Be sure to adhere to the character limits for each question.
- The personal statement should be written in **first person** and **active voice**.
- Some people struggle to boast about themselves. If this is true of you, consider talking to your supervisors, peers, and personal connections about their impression of your KSAOs. In addition, reflect on your accomplishments by noting skills and lessons learned for each entry on your Curriculum Vita (CV). Get feedback on early drafts of your statement from current advisors and mentors.
- Ensure that each item included in your answers is **relevant** to the application for doctoral-level work in applied behavior analysis.
- Be authentic and honest.
- Edit your answers for clarity, concision, and proper grammar.

Curriculum Vita (CV)

- Check out these helpful existing resources on perfecting your CV:
 - <https://www.marquette.edu/career-services/resources/cv-guide.php>
 - <https://www.apa.org/gradpsych/2015/01/curriculum-vitae>
- Always include a header (your name and contact information) and a section on education (undergraduate and master's degree information).
- In addition, include any of the following sections that are relevant to you: publications, presentations, professional/clinical employment, teaching experience, research experience, community involvement/service, honors (e.g., scholarships, grants, awards), languages spoken, references, etc. This list is not exhaustive. If you have any experiences that contribute to your aptitude to succeed in the ABA PhD program that are not otherwise listed here, please include them.
- Organize your CV so that it is easy to read and proofread your CV for any errors prior to submitting.

Letters of Recommendation

- Seek letters from advisors, instructors, mentors, or employers who can attest to the ways you demonstrate the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs) listed in the table above.
- Provide each potential letter writer ample time (one month is ideal).
- Be as organized as possible when you ask for letters. If you are applying to multiple programs, provide each potential letter writer with a spreadsheet that details the programs, deadlines, website links, and items required for the reference.
- Provide your letter writers with your updated CV (see above) at minimum. It is even better if you can provide your letter writers with copies of your application statements as well.
- Provide letter writers with a clear deadline and send a friendly email prompt at least 24 hours ahead of the deadline if you believe they have not yet sent your letter. Here is a recommended format for that prompt:

Dear Dr. Last Name,

Thank you again for agreeing to be a reference for my application to the University of Nebraska Medical Center's PhD program in Applied Behavior Analysis. This is a friendly reminder that the letter is due tomorrow by 5pm.

*Sincerely,
Your name*

- If you have not been in touch with your letter writer for some time (e.g., undergraduate research mentor from two years ago), it may be helpful to schedule a meeting with them to catch up on the new experiences you have had since they last spoke to you.
- Send your letter writer a personal thank you note after they submit their letters to express your gratitude for their time.

Do you offer campus visits/tours?

To maintain an equitable admissions process, we will offer campus tours to only those applicants who have received an offer of admission or have been notified that they are on the waitlist. To schedule a tour, please follow the steps outlined on our website under “[Schedule a Tour](#)”

Must I indicate a potential PhD advisor prior to admission? How do I select a potential PhD advisor?

- In your application, you are asked to nominate at least one faculty who may serve as your PhD advisor. Here, you should include all faculty whose interests and backgrounds align with your degree expectations. Regardless of your nominations, your application will be reviewed by a full committee of faculty.
- If you are granted admission into the program, you will be “matched” with one of the faculty advisors who you nominated in your application. This individual will be responsible for guiding your experience in the PhD program. Thus, you should thoroughly research the background of faculty prior to applying. Faculty bios can be found by clicking the faculty names at the bottom of our [ABA PhD program website](#).
- When reviewing faculty bios, ask yourself the following questions:
 - How does this faculty’s expertise align with my career aspirations?
 - What excites me about this faculty’s research?
 - Does this faculty have values that align with my own?
- Bios may not provide all of the answers to your questions, so we also recommend:
 - Conducting a search of the faculty name to review their personal websites, publications, and any other publicly available information (e.g., affiliations)
 - Contacting the faculty via email to ask specific question, requesting a brief meeting with the faculty, and/or requesting a brief meeting with the faculty member’s current or former advisees
 - Attending a Zoom Open House to meet the faculty (see “Do you offer campus visits/tours” above)
 - Asking questions about potential advisors during the interview process. For example, you may ask the interviewing faculty about their mentoring style or approach, opportunities for students in their research lab, frequency of contact, success of past graduates, etc.
- We recommend conducting a thorough online search of the faculty member prior to contacting them directly to avoid appearing uninformed.
- If you contact a potential PhD advisor ahead of the application process, it is best to provide a brief summary of your current experiences and career goals related to the ABA PhD program. You may provide a Curriculum Vita (see above) in place of a narrative summary. Let the faculty know that you intend to apply (or have recently applied) to the ABA PhD program and indicate your interest in their advisement. End with a clear indication of your desired response: (a) If you

have specific questions, list them, (b) If you would like to request a meeting, list your general availability and time zone, (c) If no follow-up is needed, simply express your appreciation for the consideration of your application. Here is a recommended format for that email:

Dear Dr. Last Name,

My name is [your name] and I am a [current academic or professional position(s)] at [current affiliation]. I plan to apply for the doctoral program in Applied Behavior Analysis at UNMC, and I would like to list you as a potential advisor. Your [describe faculty interests/experiences] align with my [describe your interests/experiences]. Attached is my CV. Below, I have listed a few questions I would like to ask ahead of the application deadline – or – I am hoping we could meet to further discuss my interests. I am generally available [add availability and time zone]. Are you available any of those times? I appreciate your time!

Sincerely,

Your name

We welcome your feedback on this resource! If you have any ideas or suggestions to make it more helpful, please reach out to Nicole.rodriquez@unmc.edu