



AUBURN UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS

Department of Psychological Sciences

**Prospective Graduate Student Guide for the
Auburn University Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience Laboratory (CAN Lab)**

<http://aucanlab.com>

Principal Investigator: [Jen Robinson, Ph.D.](#)

Currently accepting students for Fall 2024 admission

I created this document as a guide for potential applicants who are interested in joining our laboratory as graduate students. While I will make every effort to respond to each individual email, I also value and protect my time with my current trainees. As a result, I do hope that this document will answer some of the most common questions about our lab and the application process. Additional information about AU's Cognitive and Behavioral Sciences Ph.D. Program (CaBS) can be found at <https://cla.auburn.edu/psychology/cabs/>, and more specific information about our lab can be found on our webpage <http://aucanlab.com>.

Research Interests

While the lab's research interests are diverse and varied, there are underlying themes that unite our projects. We are largely interested in understanding brain function, especially with regard to the interconnectivity of the brain using high-field, high-resolution functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI). I personally have an interest in the limbic system and the dynamic interactions between cognitive and affective processes. Additionally, over the next few years, our lab will be exploring how the central and autonomic nervous systems guide the body's responses under various conditions. Because of the competitive nature of the application process, **I highly encourage potential applicants to have interests that align with the aforementioned.**

Mentorship & Approach

My mentoring philosophy revolves around 4 key components: 1) respect, 2) scholarship, 3) commitment, and 4) support. I am at my best when I am mentoring students who share interests that are aligned with my strengths. If you are interested in the clinical aspects of trauma processing, or in the prevention and treatment of trauma, I would not be an ideal mentor for you - however, if you are interested in the neurobiology underlying memory formation in the hippocampus, and how affective processes may contribute to it, or would like to use functional neuroimaging to study these processes, then I would likely be a good match for you.

What you should do next...

If you find that your interests and those of the lab are in clear alignment, **you may naturally wonder whether you would be competitive for admission and how you should put your best foot forward in your application.** Commonly folks want to ask whether this or that type of experience is a prerequisite (e.g., thesis, post-bac), whether we use a cutoff GPA or GRE scores, and so forth. I get it, there's a lot riding on these applications, they are expensive and effortful, and so naturally there is a lot of anxiety and stress about preparing them. To the extent I can, I'd like to tell you exactly what I am looking for in an applicant and some examples of how I might evaluate whether an applicant meets these criteria. Importantly, there are lots of non-specifics that you may want to convey - maturity, life experiences, social skills, etc. - all of which are important considerations. Please understand that I view all applications holistically, to the best of my ability.

This table outlines some of the key areas I focus on when reviewing applications and some ways to convey that you might have what it takes. I don't mean to make this list exhaustive or prescriptive, but merely to highlight some of the major themes and how you might go about conveying them.

1	Intrinsic motivation and perseverance	Science is tough. There's a lot of rejection and many unforeseen challenges. Provide examples of how you have overcome challenges/obstacles in prior work or your personal life.
2	Aligned research interests	Usually, in your personal statement/statement of intent, the applicant will lay out a coherent and compelling narrative with examples of how they came to be interested in the research topic(s).
3	Quantitative skills	Traditionally, strong GRE scores in these areas would provide strong evidence. However, the GRE is not required. As such, evidence of taking/doing well in statistics and math courses would be a good alternative. You may also wish to ask your recommendation letter writers to speak to these qualities. Please also be sure to include any coding/programming skills that you may have on your CV/resume.
4	Reasoning and writing skills	Traditionally, strong verbal/analytic scores on the GRE would provide good evidence. However, GRE scores are not required. Writing samples can be a great demonstration of your work, and your statement of purpose will also be a reflection of your ability to write.
5	Organizational skills and attention to detail	Be sure to include a list of skills on your CV/resume and, if relevant, give examples of experience in which you demonstrated these skills.

Moreover, I value diversity in background and life experiences, and so if you are from a traditionally underrepresented group or background or have taken an idiosyncratic path to get to this point, I encourage you to apply if we otherwise fit your scholarly interests and goals.

I hope this helps you as you consider our lab and program. If after reading all this you have a very specific question that would make the difference between applying or not, please feel free to reach out to me.

I look forward to reviewing your application!

Best wishes for continued academic success,



Jen Robinson, Ph.D.

Alumni Professor

Department of Psychological Sciences