

**OPEN LETTER TO PROSPECTIVE APPLICANTS TO THE GRADUATE PROGRAM
AT THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN PERFORMANCE,
IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY,
WITH EMPHASIS ON EXERCISE AND SPORT PSYCHOLOGY**

Dr. Panteleimon “Paddy” Ekkekakis

Hello! You are receiving this letter because you have contacted either the coordinator of the graduate programs at the Department of Health and Human Performance here at Iowa State University, Dr. Rick Sharp, or me regarding opportunities for graduate studies with emphasis on exercise and sport psychology. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with some useful information that should help you decide whether the program here at ISU fits your interests and needs.

What I want to emphasize the most is the distinction between *sport* and *exercise* psychology. *Sport psychology* deals with athletic populations and its ultimate goal is to enhance sport performance. On the other hand, *exercise psychology* deals with non-athletic populations who exercise for health and well-being. The purpose of exercise psychology is to understand the psychological mechanisms behind participation in and long-term adherence to exercise, as well as the psychological effects of exercise participation.

If you are interested in applying for a graduate program here at ISU, understanding this distinction is very important. This is because, although most individuals who contact me are interested in *sport psychology*, my research is in the area of *exercise psychology*. Specifically, I am interested in how exercise intensity affects how people feel as they exercise (e.g., do they feel exhilaration, distress, fatigue, or boredom?), how individuals differ in terms of their preference for and tolerance of different levels of exercise intensity, and how these factors influence the enjoyment of exercise and the motivation to stay in an exercise program over the long haul. If you are interested in these and other exercise psychology topics, I strongly encourage you to take a look at my website, where you will find the titles and abstracts of my publications and other relevant information: <http://www.ekkekakis.com/research.html>. If you want to take a look at a paper to get a more complete picture of what the research is about, I would be more than happy to provide you with a reprint. Simply send me a message via e-mail (ekkekaki@iastate.edu) and I will send you any paper you want as an attachment.

Therefore, if you are interested in *exercise psychology*, the program here at Iowa State University should be a great choice for you. I can promise you that, by joining our graduate program in exercise psychology, you will be involved in cutting-edge research, you will get extensive hands-on laboratory experience with a variety of assessment techniques, you will be given the opportunity to co-author research papers and prepare conference presentations, and you will participate in lively and thought-provoking conversations about science, research, and practice. I can also promise you that you will always have a friendly and calm working environment and caring guidance.

If, on the other hand, you are interested in *sport psychology* and your goal is to work with athletes as sport psychology consultants or coaches, then the program here at ISU may not be a good match for you. Although I teach undergraduate and graduate courses in sport psychology and have done research in sport psychology during the earlier stages of my career, my current research does not involve working with athletes, doing any consulting work, or investigating issues related to performance enhancement, etc. What this means for those of you interested in *sport psychology* is that, by attending the program here at ISU, you may not get the kinds of experiences that you had anticipated and that you *should* have if you intend to work in the area of sport. I, therefore, highly recommend that, if you are interested in *sport psychology*, you consider applying to the other excellent graduate programs here in Iowa, such as those offered by The University of Iowa and the University of Northern Iowa. These programs offer master’s degrees with emphasis on sport psychology. You can get information about these programs from the sources listed here:

Department of Health, Physical Education, and Leisure Services
University of Northern Iowa
Wellness Recreation Center
Cedar Falls, IA 50614

Contact: Dr. Mick Mack
E-mail: mickey.mack@uni.edu
Tel. (319) 273-6442
URL: http://www.uni.edu/coe/hpels/faculty/mack_m.htm

Contact: Dr. Sharon Huddleston
E-mail: sharon.huddleston@uni.edu
Tel. (319) 273-2730
URL: <http://www.uni.edu/coe/hpels/faculty/huddleston.htm>

Department of Health, Leisure, and Sport Studies
University of Iowa
Field House
Iowa City, IA 52242-1111

Contact: Dr. Dawn Stephens
E-mail: dawn-e-stephens@uiowa.edu
Tel. (319) 335-9348
URL: <http://www.uiowa.edu/~hlss/faculty/stephens.htm>

Now, let me tell you what I expect of graduate students. **First** of all, I expect commitment to academic excellence. In other words, graduate study should be your main mission during your stay here and until you earn your degree. This should be self-understood, but oftentimes students get into graduate school simply to postpone their entry into the work force or to have more time to devote to other, non-academic pursuits. In such cases, graduate study is unfortunately relegated to a chore. I would not want you to overlook the other important aspects of your life, but I do expect that all prospective graduate students understand that graduate study towards an advanced degree requires a lot of hard work, long hours, and extensive reading and writing, often dealing with complex subject matters. This may require some sacrifice. **Second**, I expect self-motivation. I like working with people who are *genuinely interested* in the subject area on which they are working and really care about finding a solution to the problems that they are investigating. I appreciate students who go to the library or stay in the lab analyzing data not because I told them to but because they are driven by their own passion to find answers. **Third**, I expect initiative and critical thought. The ideal graduate student, in my view, is one that does not take anything for granted but is constantly evaluating everything, including my own opinions or ideas. Furthermore, nothing makes me happier than to see that students have their own ideas about where our research should go. I interpret this as the clearest expression of genuine interest in the problems that we, as a group, are trying to solve.

If, after reading all this, you are convinced that the graduate program here at ISU would be a good match for you, I would be more than happy to get in contact with you and give you additional information or even arrange a meeting with you if you are willing to visit. I can show you around the department, introduce you to our graduate students, show you around the lab, and chat with you about our program. My contact information follows. Please do not hesitate to use it!

Sincerely,

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