

# Careers in Psychology: Planning for Success<sup>1</sup>

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## THE PSYCHOLOGY MAJOR

### What can you do with a degree in psychology?

Lots! As a psychology major, you will graduate from college with a scientific mind-set and an awareness of basic principles of human behavior (biological, developmental, mental disorder-related, social). This background will prepare you for success in many areas, including business, helping professions, health services, marketing, law, sales, and teaching. You may even go on to graduate school for specialized training to become a psychology professional. You are in the right place for answers to important questions about pursuing the study of psychology: Is psychology the right major for you? What are the various levels of psychology education, and what kinds of jobs are available at those levels? What are psychology's specialized subfields? What are some ways you can improve your chances of admission to graduate school?

### How do you know if psychology is the right major for you?

Start by answering some of the following questions to see if you would be well matched with a major in psychology.

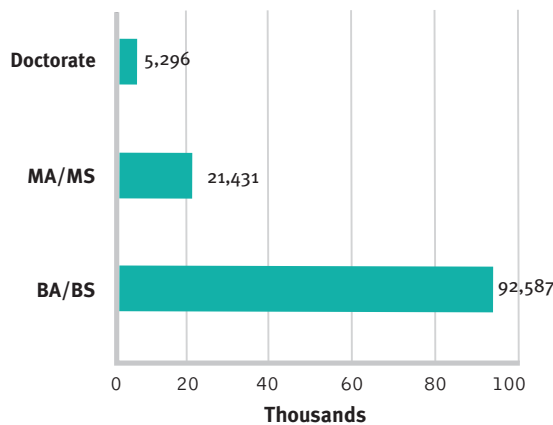
Do you:

- enjoy learning about the ways we think and behave and why?
- appreciate the value of applying the scientific method to answer questions?
- have an interest in a career that requires interpersonal skills?
- want to learn critical thinking and analytical skills?
- want to learn communication and presentation skills?
- want to gain computer skills in data processing and skills in research methodology such as assessment and statistics?
- want to work in human and/or animal services?
- have a desire to apply psychological principles to understand or solve personal, social, organizational and/or environmental problems?

If you answered “yes” to most or all of these questions, then psychology may be the right major for you.

<sup>1</sup>Although this web page covers the world of psychology for students in many countries, it draws primarily from available U.S. data. Its descriptions of psychology's subfields and its suggestions for preparing to enter the profession are, however, applicable in many other countries.

**FIGURE 1** Number of Psychology Degrees Conferred by Level of Degree: 2008



Adapted from APA Center for Workforce Studies, January 2010. Source: U.S. Dept. of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Data System Completion Survey.  
 Note: Doctorate degree includes PsyD.

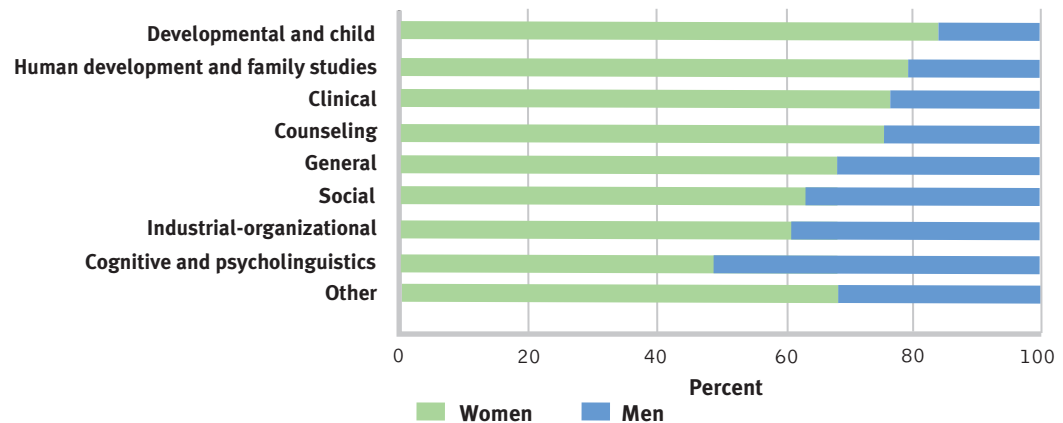
### How popular is the psychology major?

Psychology is a very popular major. After business and accounting majors (13 percent and 8 percent, respectively), psychology, nursing, and elementary education are tied for the third most popular majors (each 4 percent of all majors) (Carnevale, Strohl, & Melton, 2011). In 2008, more than 92,000 psychology majors graduated with a bachelor’s degree in psychology from U.S. colleges and universities (Mulvey & Grus, 2010) (FIGURE 1).

### Who is studying psychology at the undergraduate and graduate levels?

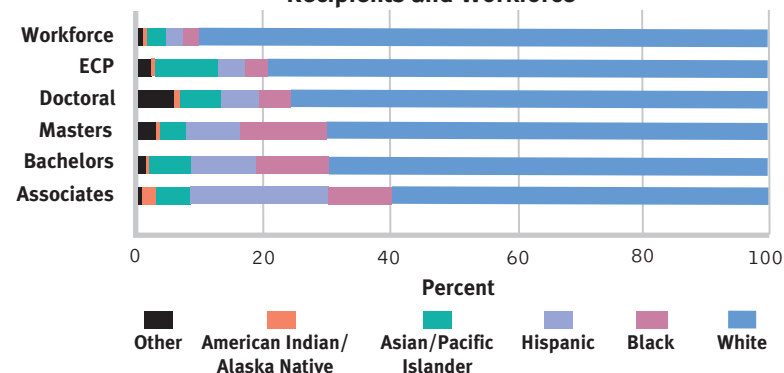
In 2008–2009, 77 percent of the graduating majors with bachelor’s degrees in psychology were women. This tendency for most degree recipients in psychology to be women was also observed for master’s degrees (80 percent) and doctoral degrees (73 percent). Women were most likely to earn specialized doctorate degrees in developmental and child psychology, whereas men were more likely to focus on cognitive and psycholinguistic psychology (FIGURE 2). Most psychology degree recipients at the bachelor’s, master’s, and doctorate levels were White (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2010) (FIGURE 3).

**FIGURE 2** Psychology PhDs Awarded by Subfield and Sex: 2009



Adapted from APA Center for Workforce Studies, January 2011. Sources: NSF/NIH/USED/USDA/NEH/NASA, 2009 Survey of Earned Doctorates.

**FIGURE 3** Race/Ethnicity of Psychology Degree Recipients and Workforce



Adapted from APA Center for Workforce Studies, June 2010. Sources: U.S. Dept. of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Data System (IPEDS).

### What are the main reasons that undergraduate students choose to study psychology?

One study found that the number one reason psychology majors chose their major was a positive experience in their introduction to psychology course (Marrs, Barb, & Ruggiero, 2007). Other research has found that the top five reasons students choose a psychology major are as follows: provides the ability to help others, incorporates interesting subject matter, produces a better understanding of self and others, includes good career and/or salary potential, and offers the ability to conduct research (Mulvey & Grus, 2010).

### What types of skills will you learn as a psychology major?

Studies suggest that psychology majors learn a set of skills that are not offered by other social science majors. The skills include communication, information gathering, interpersonal management, and research methodology (Kruger & Zechmeister, 2001, as cited in Wegenek & Buskist, 2010).

The psychology major's skill set prepares graduates for numerous opportunities in the professional world and a range of graduate training options. The skills include an ability to work and get along with others, a desire and willingness to learn new things, adaptability to changing situations, and a capacity for problem solving (Landrum, 2001). Psychology majors also have a number of methodological skills that result from the focus on the scientific study of human and animal behavior. The study of statistics and research methodology contributes to a scientific mind-set that emphasizes exploring and managing uncertainty, critical thinking and analytical skills, and logical thinking abilities. The ability to analyze data using statistics, conduct database searches, and integrate multiple sources of information are helpful in a number of professional settings. Prospective employers appreciate the excellent written and verbal communication skills among students who present their research projects at conferences and master American Psychological Association (APA) style.

## CAREER OPTIONS WITH A DEGREE IN PSYCHOLOGY

### What can you do with a bachelor's degree in psychology?

If you major in psychology, you will have several possible career paths to follow. First, you might consider employment after graduation in a variety of professional settings. Here are the top five occupations for graduates with a bachelor's degree in psychology (Carnevale, Strohl, & Melton, 2011):

1. Management
2. Office work
3. Community service
4. Sales
5. Education

Here are the top five industries in which graduates with a bachelor's degree in psychology may be found working (Carnevale, Strohl, & Melton, 2011):

1. Health service
2. Education

3. Financial services
4. Public administration
5. Professional services

If you choose to work more directly in the field of psychology, a bachelor's degree will qualify you to work as an assistant to psychologists, researchers, or other professionals in community mental health centers, vocational rehabilitation offices, and correctional programs (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011).

A second option for psychology majors after graduation is to pursue a master's degree or doctorate in psychology. Snyder and Dillow (2010) estimate that 20–24 percent of psychology baccalaureate recipients continue on to graduate study in psychology (approximately 8–10 percent pursue doctorates).

A third option is to pursue advanced training in other disciplines such as law, business, education, or medicine.

Millspaugh, Hammersley, and Appleby (2010) have prepared a list of 172 careers that would be of interest to psychology majors—including those pursuing advanced degrees. The list includes links for more information about professional responsibilities, salaries, and job outlook for each of these positions.

### How can you maximize your ability to get a job after graduating with a major in psychology?

Betsy Morgan and Ann Korschgen (2009) offer the following helpful tips for increasing your chances of getting a job after graduation. Many of these tools will benefit students who plan to apply to graduate school as well.

1. **Get to know your instructors.** Talk with them about the field of psychology and get their advice on your career plan. Ask them to support you on an independent study internship or research project. By learning more about your skills and future goals, faculty members can help you accomplish your goals. This may even result in an enthusiastic reference for future employment.
2. **Familiarize yourself with available resources.** Talk to alumni and senior students. Career services can help you identify and market your job skills and emphasize the knowledge and abilities you have in your resume. They can also help you to network with other alumni who are working in your area of interest and who can help you to prepare for the career that you want. Take advantage of Career Services and other online resources.
3. **Volunteer some of your time and talent to campus or community organizations, such as Psi Chi (the national honor society in psychology) or your school's psychology club.** In addition to showing that you are an active citizen in your department, you will gain important skills, such as meeting and event planning, how to work with a group, and improved communication skills, all of which enhance your marketability.
4. **Participate in an internship experience.** Many employers want students to gain relevant experience outside the classroom. Internships are offered during the school year as well as the summer break. Some are paid and others are not, but you may be able to earn course credit while completing your internship. In addition to gaining relevant work experience before you graduate, you will increase your support network of mentors who can provide supervision and support for your career goals as well as letters of support when you apply for jobs.
5. **Take courses that support your interests and plans.** Although the psychology major offers a range of skills that will benefit you in the job market, don't assume that the psychology curriculum will offer all the skills necessary to get a job in your area of

interest. Add courses to increase your knowledge base and skills. Doing so will also show prospective employers that your specific interests are in line with the demands of the job.

### What type of salary can you expect with a degree in psychology? Will a graduate degree increase your salary?

A recent study, based on data from 2009, found that earnings increase with education and that higher levels of educational attainment will almost always yield greater financial rewards (Carnevale, Strohl, & Melton, 2011). The median earnings of psychology majors with a bachelor's degree were \$45,000. When considering baccalaureates from 171 majors, the median earnings for those with bachelor's degrees varied greatly, from \$29,000 for counseling psychology majors to \$120,000 for petroleum engineering majors.

When considering new doctoral recipients in 2009, the overall median starting salary was \$64,000 with an average of \$66,008 ( $sd = \$23,861$ ). Women reported a median salary that was \$8,000 lower than that reported by men (\$70,000 versus \$62,000, respectively). Median salaries reported by ethnic minorities were similar to those indicated by nonminorities: \$65,000. The mean salaries for these two groups were also close, at \$65,962 and \$66,314, respectively (Michalski, Kohout, Wicherski, & Hart, 2011).

Among psychologists with new doctoral level degrees in 2009, clinical psychologists working in criminal justice earned the highest median starting salary of \$80,500. Psychology graduates working in consulting firms (\$75,000) and those working in applied psychology positions (\$73,332) tended to have the next two highest median salaries (Michalski, Kohout, Wicherski, & Hart, 2011).

The highest median 9- to 10-month salaries among new doctorate recipients in 2009 were reported by assistant professors in academic departments in universities (\$60,000) other than psychology or education departments. Other disciplines, such as business, may be more competitive in starting salary packages for recent graduates than more traditional psychology departments (Michalski, Kohout, Wicherski, & Hart, 2011).

Psychologists (and medical scientists) rank seventh among the top-paying occupations for people with doctoral degrees. The lifetime salary in 2009 dollars was \$2,515,000 for graduate-level psychologists whereas the lifetime average for all doctoral occupations was \$3,252,000 (Carnevale, Rose, & Cheah, 2011).

Of course, earning potential should not be the only reason that individuals choose a major. Job satisfaction level is another important consideration.

### What kind of job satisfaction can you expect if you are working in a psychology field?

In a study of 27,000 Americans, the most satisfying jobs were found to be those that involve "caring for, teaching and protecting others and creative pursuits" (Smith, 2007, pp. 1–2). Most of the occupations with the highest-ranking happiness levels among the workers involved helping others, using technical and scientific expertise, or using creativity (pp. 1–2). A bachelor's degree in psychology can increase the likelihood that you will be working in a job that fosters these skills (Landrum, 2009).

Positive job satisfaction has also been observed among individuals who attend graduate school in psychology. In 2009, a total of 72 percent of new doctorate recipients indicated that their primary occupational position was their first choice. Most new graduates with a Ph.D. are fairly satisfied with their current position in terms of salary, benefits, opportunities for personal development, supervisors, colleagues, and working conditions (Michalski, Kohout, Wicherski, & Hart, 2011).

## POSTGRADUATE DEGREES

### Why should you consider attending graduate school in psychology?

In addition to a higher salary and strong job satisfaction, a graduate degree in psychology will give you proficiency in an area of psychological specialization and increased opportunities to work in diverse areas of psychology.

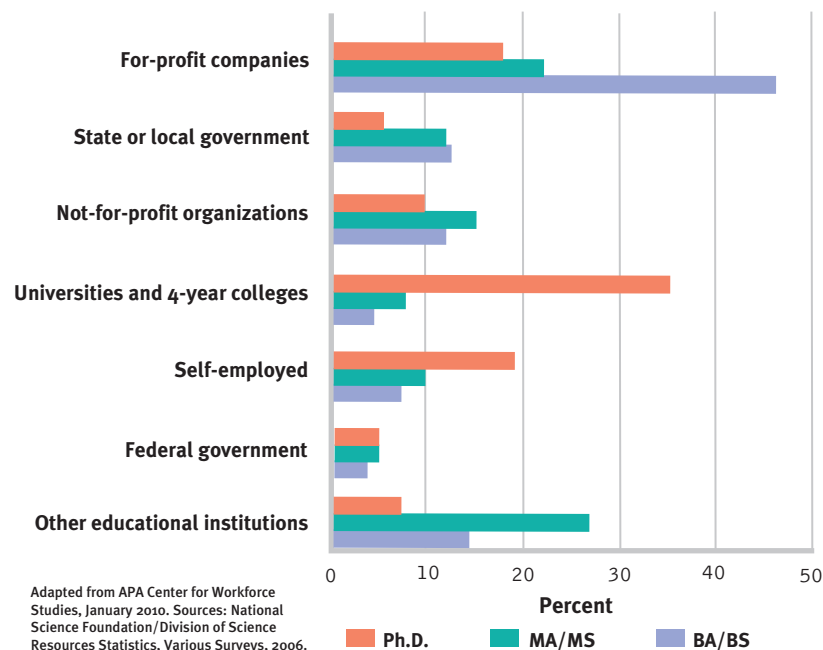
Job prospects in the field of psychology are much better for individuals with graduate degrees. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2011), job prospects will be the best for people who have a doctoral degree from a leading university in an applied specialty area, such as counseling or health, as well as those with a specialist or doctoral degree in school psychology. At the master's degree level, individuals in fields other than industrial-organizational psychology will face keen competition. Opportunities in the field of psychology will be limited for bachelor's degree holders.

Psychologists with advanced degrees held approximately 70,200 jobs in 2008. Employment for psychologists is expected to grow 12 percent from 2008 to 2018, which is faster than the average for all occupations. Employment will grow because of increased demand for psychological services in schools, hospitals, social service agencies, mental health centers, substance abuse treatment clinics, consulting firms, and private companies (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011).

### What's the difference between a master's degree and a doctorate degree in psychology?

Both degrees will prepare you for more specialized training in psychology and open your job opportunities in the field of psychology beyond the bachelor's degree. However, the work settings for individuals with a psychology degree vary somewhat by type of graduate degree. Psychologists with a doctorate work primarily in universities and colleges; most people with a master's degree work in other educational institutions (such as elementary and middle schools) and in for-profit companies (Mulvey & Grus, 2010) (FIGURE 4).

**FIGURE 4** Work Settings for Psychology Degree Recipients, 2006



A master's degree in psychology requires at least two years of full-time graduate study in a specific subfield of psychology. In addition to specialized course work in psychology, requirements usually include practical experience in an applied setting and/or a master's thesis reporting on an original research project. You might acquire a master's degree to do specialized work in psychology. As a graduate with a master's degree, you might handle research and data collection and analysis in a university, government, or private industry setting. You might work under the supervision of a psychologist with a doctorate, providing some clinical service such as therapy or testing. Or you might find a job in the health, government, industry, or education fields. You might also acquire a master's degree as a stepping stone for more advanced study in a doctoral program in psychology, which will expand the number of employment opportunities available to you.

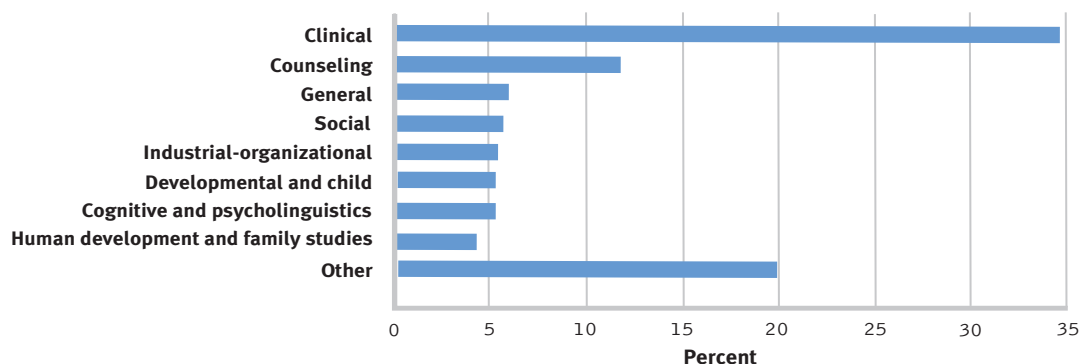
You will probably need five to seven years of graduate study in a specific subfield of psychology to get your doctoral degree. The degree you choose to pursue will depend on your career goals. You will probably choose to earn a doctor of philosophy (Ph.D.) in psychology if your career goals are geared toward conducting research or a doctor of psychology (Psy.D.) if you are more interested in pursuing professional practice. Training for the Ph.D. culminates in a dissertation (an extensive research paper you will be required to defend orally) based on original research. Courses in quantitative research methods, which include the use of computer-based analysis, are an important part of graduate study and are necessary to complete the dissertation. Psy.D. training may be based on clinical (therapeutic) work and examinations rather than a dissertation. It is important to note, however, that psychologists with Psy.D. degrees are not the only ones who work in professional practice. Many psychologists who earn a Ph.D. in clinical or counseling psychology conduct research and work in professional settings. If you pursue clinical and counseling psychology programs, you should expect at least a one-year internship in addition to the regular course work, clinical practice, and research.

**FIGURE 5** shows by subfield the Ph.D.s earned in the United States in 2009, the most recent year for which these data are available (Mulvey, 2011). As you can see, clinical psychology is the most popular specialty area among people with doctorates in psychology.

### What are some of the subfields of psychology?

If you are like most psychology students, you may be unaware of the wide variety of specialties and work settings available in psychology (Terre & Stoddart, 2000). To date, the American Psychological Association (APA) has 56 divisions (**FIGURE 6**). The following paragraphs (arranged alphabetically) describe some careers in the main specialty areas of psychology, most of which require a graduate degree in psychology.

**FIGURE 5** Psychology Ph.D.s Awarded by Subfield, 2009



Adapted from APA Center for Workforce Studies, January 2011. Sources: NSF/NIH/USED/USDA/NEH/NASA, 2009 Survey of Earned Doctorates.

FIGURE 6

## APA Divisions by Number and Name

1. Society for General Psychology	29. Psychotherapy
2. Society for the Teaching of Psychology	30. Society of Psychological Hypnosis
3. Experimental Psychology	31. State, Provincial, and Territorial Psychological Association Affairs
4. There is no Division 4.	32. Society for Humanistic Psychology
5. Evaluation, Measurement, and Statistics	33. Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
6. Behavioral Neuroscience and Comparative Psychology	34. Society for Environmental, Population, and Conservation Psychology
7. Developmental Psychology	35. Society for the Psychology of Women
8. Society for Personality and Social Psychology	36. Society for the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality
9. Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI)	37. Society for Child and Family Policy and Practice
10. Society for the Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts	38. Health Psychology
11. There is no Division 11.	39. Psychoanalysis
12. Society of Clinical Psychology	40. Clinical Neuropsychology
13. Society of Consulting Psychology	41. American Psychology-Law Society
14. Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology	42. Psychologists in Independent Practice
15. Educational Psychology	43. Society for Family Psychology
16. School Psychology	44. Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues
17. Society of Counseling Psychology	45. Society for the Psychological Study of Ethnic Minority Issues
18. Psychologists in Public Service	46. Media Psychology
19. Military Psychology	47. Exercise and Sport Psychology
20. Adult Development and Aging	48. Society for the Study of Peace, Conflict, and Violence: Peace Psychology Division
21. Applied Experimental and Engineering Psychology	49. Society of Group Psychology and Group Psychotherapy
22. Rehabilitation Psychology	50. Society of Addiction Psychology
23. Society for Consumer Psychology	51. Society for the Psychological Study of Men and Masculinity
24. Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology	52. International Psychology
25. Behavior Analysis	53. Society of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology
26. Society for the History of Psychology	54. Society of Pediatric Psychology
27. Society for Community Research and Action: Division of Community Psychology	55. American Society for the Advancement of Pharmacotherapy
28. Psychopharmacology and Substance Abuse	56. Trauma Psychology

Source: American Psychological Association.

**Clinical psychologists** promote psychological health in individuals, groups, and organizations. Some clinical psychologists specialize in specific psychological disorders. Others treat a range of disorders, from adjustment difficulties to severe psychopathology. Clinical psychologists might engage in research, teaching, assessment, and consultation. Some hold workshops and lectures on psychological issues for other professionals or for the public. Clinical psychologists work in a variety of settings, including private practice,



mental health service organizations, schools, universities, industries, legal systems, medical systems, counseling centers, government agencies, and military services.

To become a clinical psychologist, you will need to earn a doctorate from a clinical psychology program. The APA sets the standards for clinical psychology graduate programs, offering accreditation (official recognition) to those who meet their standards. In all U.S. states, clinical psychologists working in independent practice must obtain a license to offer services such as therapy and testing.

Cognitive psychologists study thought processes and focus on such topics as perception, language, attention, problem solving, memory, judgment and decision making, forgetting, and intelligence. Recent areas of research interest include designing computer-based models of thought processes and identifying biological correlates of cognition. As a cognitive psychologist, you might work as a professor, industrial consultant, or human factors specialist in an educational or business setting.

**Community psychologists** move beyond focusing on specific individuals or families and deal with broad problems of mental health in community settings. These psychologists believe that human behavior is powerfully influenced by the interaction between people and their physical, social, political, and economic environments. They seek to improve individual functioning by enhancing environmental settings to promote psychological health.

Community psychologists focus on prevention, promotion of positive mental health, and crisis intervention, with special attention to the problems of underserved groups and ethnic minorities. Given the shared emphasis on prevention, some community psychologists collaborate with professionals in other areas, such as public health. As a community psychologist, your work settings could include federal, state, and local departments of mental health, corrections, and welfare systems. You might conduct research or help evaluate research in health service settings, serve as an independent consultant for a private or government agency, or teach and consult as a college or university faculty member.

**Counseling psychologists** help people adjust to life transitions or make lifestyle changes. This field is very similar to clinical psychology, except that counseling psychologists typically help people with adjustment problems rather than severe psychopathology. Like clinical psychologists, counseling psychologists conduct therapy and provide assessments to individuals and groups. As a counseling psychologist, you would emphasize your clients' strengths, helping clients cope during a transitional time using their own skills, interests, and abilities. You might find yourself working in an academic setting as a faculty member or administrator or in a university counseling center, community mental health center, business, or private practice. As with clinical psychology, if you plan to work in independent practice you will need to obtain a state license to provide counseling services to the public.

**Developmental psychologists** conduct research in age-related behavioral changes and apply their scientific knowledge to educational, child care, policy, and related settings. As a developmental psychologist, you would investigate change across a broad range of topics, including the biological, social, psychological, and cognitive aspects of development. Developmental psychology informs a number of applied fields, including educational psychology, school psychology, child psychopathology, and gerontology. The field also informs public policy in areas such as education and childcare reform, maternal and child health and attachment, and adoption. You would probably specialize in behavior during infancy, childhood, adolescence, or middle or late adulthood. Your work setting could be an educational institution, day-care center, youth group program, or senior center.

**Educational psychologists** study the relationship between learning and our physical and social environments. They study the psychological processes involved in learning and develop strategies for enhancing the learning process. As an educational psychologist, you might work in a university—in a psychology department or a school of education. You might conduct basic research on topics related to learning or develop innovative methods of teaching to enhance the learning process. You might design effective tests, including measures of aptitude and achievement. You might be employed by a school or government agency or charged with designing and implementing effective employee-training programs in a business setting.

**Experimental psychologists** are a diverse group of scientists who investigate a variety of basic behavioral processes in research involving humans and/or other animals. Prominent areas of study in experimental research include comparative methods of science, motivation, learning, thought, attention, memory, perception, and language. Most experimental psychologists identify with a particular subfield, such as cognitive psychology, depending on their area of study. It is also important to note that the experimental method for conducting research studies is not limited to the field of experimental psychology, as many other subfields rely on experimental methodology to conduct studies. As an experimental psychologist, you would most likely work in an academic setting, teaching courses and supervising students' research in addition to conducting your own research using experimental methodology. Or you might be employed by a research institution, zoo, business, industry affiliate, or government agency.

**Forensic psychologists** apply psychological principles to legal issues. They conduct research on the interface of law and psychology, help to create public policies related to mental health, help law-enforcement agencies in criminal investigations or assist in forensic consultation involving jury selection and deliberation research. They also provide therapy and assessment to assist the legal community. Some forensic psychologists hold law degrees and provide clients with legal services as well. Although most forensic psychologists are clinical psychologists, they might have expertise in other areas of psychology, such as social or cognitive psychology. As a forensic psychologist, you might work in a university psychology department, law school, research organization, community mental health agency, law-enforcement agency, court, or correctional setting.

**Health psychologists** are researchers and practitioners concerned with psychology's contribution to promoting health and preventing disease. As applied psychologists or clinicians, they may help individuals lead healthier lives by designing, conducting, and evaluating programs to stop smoking, lose weight, improve sleep, manage pain, treat psychosocial problems associated with chronic and terminal illness, or prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections. As researchers and clinicians, they identify conditions and practices associated with health and illness to help create effective interventions. In public service, health psychologists study and work to improve government policies and health care systems. As a health psychologist, you could be employed in a hospital, medical school, rehabilitation center, public health agency, college or university, or, if you are also a clinical psychologist, in private practice.

**Industrial/organizational (I/O) psychologists** study the relationship between people and their working environments. They may develop new ways to increase productivity, improve personnel selection, or promote job satisfaction in a business setting. Their interests include organizational structure and change, consumer behavior, and personnel selection and training. As an I/O psychologist, you might conduct workplace training or provide organizational analysis and development. You may find yourself working in busi-

ness, industry, the government, or a college or university. Or you may be self-employed as a consultant or work for a management counseling firm.

**Neuropsychologists** investigate the relationship between neurological processes (structure and function of the brain) and behavior. As a neuropsychologist you might assess, diagnose, or treat disorders related to the central nervous system, such as Alzheimer's disease or stroke. You might also evaluate individuals for evidence of head injuries, learning and developmental disabilities such as autism and other psychiatric disorders including ADHD. If you are a clinical neuropsychologist, you might work in the neurology, neurosurgery, or psychiatric unit of a hospital. Neuropsychologists also work in academic settings, where they conduct research and teach.

**Psychometric and quantitative psychologists** study the methods and techniques used to acquire psychological knowledge. A psychometrician may update existing neurocognitive or personality tests or devise new tests for use in clinical and school settings or in business and industry. These psychologists also administer, score, and interpret such tests. Quantitative psychologists collaborate with researchers to design, analyze, and interpret the results of research programs. As a psychometric or quantitative psychologist, you will need to be well trained in research methods, statistics, and computer technology. You will most probably be employed by a university or college, testing company, private research firm, or government agency.

**Rehabilitation psychologists** are researchers and practitioners who work with people who have lost optimal functioning after an accident, illness, or other event. As a rehabilitation psychologist, you would probably work in a medical rehabilitation institution or hospital. You might also work in a medical school, university, state or federal vocational rehabilitation agency, or in private practice serving people with physical disabilities.

**School psychologists** are involved in the assessment of and intervention for children in educational settings. They diagnose and treat cognitive, social, and emotional problems that may negatively influence children's learning or overall functioning at school. As a school psychologist, you would collaborate with teachers, parents, and administrators, making recommendations to improve student learning. You would work in an academic setting, a federal or state government agency, a child guidance center, or a behavioral research laboratory.

**Social psychologists** are interested in our interactions with others. Social psychologists study how our beliefs, feelings, and behaviors are affected by and influence other people. They study topics such as attitudes, aggression, prejudice, interpersonal attraction, group behavior, and leadership. As a social psychologist, you would probably be a college or university faculty member. You might also work in organizational consultation, marketing research, or other applied psychology fields including social neuroscience. Some social psychologists work for hospitals, federal agencies, or businesses performing applied research.

As a **sport psychologist**, you would study the psychological factors that influence and are influenced by participation in sports and other physical activities. Professional activities of sport psychologists include coach education and athlete preparation, as well as research and teaching. Sport psychologists who also have a clinical or counseling degree can apply those skills to working with individuals with psychological problems such as anxiety or substance-abuse problems that might interfere with optimal performance. If you were not working in an academic or research setting, you would most likely work as part of a team or organization or in a private capacity.

## PREPARING EARLY FOR GRADUATE STUDY IN PSYCHOLOGY

### Why do you need to prepare for graduate study in psychology?

Competition for the openings for advanced degrees in psychology is keen. During the 2008–2009 academic year, just over one in five applicants were accepted into doctoral programs in psychology. The acceptance rate for applicants to clinical psychology programs was 29 percent among Psy.D. programs and 8 percent among Ph.D. programs. Among clinical doctoral programs in the United States, programs in traditional (university) settings received a higher median number of applications than did those in professional settings (149 vs. 120). Programs in traditional settings accepted 6 percent of the applicants received whereas programs in professional settings accepted 33 percent of the applicants. Clinical Psy.D. programs accepted a higher overall and median number of applicants than Ph.D. programs (46 versus 10) (Mulvey, Michalski, & Wicherski, 2010).

The acceptance rate for U.S. master's programs was higher than that for doctoral programs. Just over half (51 percent) of all applicants were accepted by master's programs in the United States during the 2008–2009 school year (Mulvey, Michalski, & Wicherski, 2010).

### What kind of debt can you expect after earning a doctorate degree in psychology?

Just as tuition costs vary by type of doctoral degree sought, education-related debt levels also differ by degree type. In 2007, among early career psychologists (those receiving their doctorate within the past seven years), over 30 percent of recent (1 to 2 years post-doctorate) Psy.D.s reported debt levels of over \$120,000 on receipt of their doctoral degrees. In contrast, less than 10 percent of the recent psychology Ph.D.s had comparable debt levels on receipt of their degree (APA Center for Workforce Studies, 2008). A total of 31.5 percent of doctoral (Ph.D. and Psy.D) recipients reported no debt following their doctoral training whereas 68 percent of these recent doctorates reported no debt from their undergraduate experience (APA Center for Workforce Studies, 2008). Most debt was reported to be due to tuition and living expense costs (APA Center for Workforce Studies, 2008).

### What can you do to increase your chances of being accepted into graduate school?

If you choose to go to graduate school, there are a number of things you can do now to maximize your chances of gaining admission to the school of your choice. If possible, begin preparing during your first year on campus to maximize opportunities and obtain the experience needed to gain admission to a competitive program. Kristy Arnold and Kelly Horrigan (2002) offer a number of suggestions to facilitate this process.

1. **Network.** Get to know faculty members and the psychology department by attending activities and meetings. This strategy will be especially helpful when you apply to graduate school or for a professional position because many applications require two to three letters of reference. Become involved in psychology clubs and in Psi Chi, the national honor society in psychology. These meetings connect students with similar interests and expose them to a broader study of the field.
2. **Become actively involved in research as early as possible.** Start by doing simple tasks such as data entry and data collection, and over time you will be prepared to conduct your own research project under the supervision of a research mentor. Con-

sider applying for summer research positions through your university or from other organizations such as the American Psychological Association Summer Science Fellowship Program or the National Science Foundation Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU) Program to test your interest in academic careers and to build your skills for future study in psychology.

3. **Volunteer or get a job in a psychology-related field.** Getting involved will show your willingness to apply psychological concepts to real-world settings. Further, it will showcase your ability to juggle a number of tasks successfully, such as work and school—an important skill for graduate school success.
4. **Maintain good grades and prepare early for the GRE.** Demonstrate the ability to do well in graduate school by demonstrating successful completion of challenging courses, especially those related to your interests in graduate school. In your junior year, you should begin studying for the Graduate Record Exam (GRE), the standardized test that applicants to graduate school must complete. Many graduate programs in psychology require both the General GRE and the Psychology subject tests. If you start preparing early for the GRE and maintain high grades, you will be ready for success in your graduate school application and study.

So the next time someone asks you what you will do with your psychology degree, tell them you have a lot of options. You might use your acquired skills and understanding to get a job and succeed in any number of fields, or you might pursue graduate school and then career opportunities in associated professions. In any case, what you have learned about behavior and mental processes will surely enrich your life (Hammer, 2003).

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

### How can you learn more about the psychology major and the field of psychology?

1. Talk with as many people as possible who have experience in the discipline of psychology. Talk with psychology majors, graduate students in psychology, psychology instructors, advisors, and other professionals who train in psychology or work in the field.
2. Go to your college's Career Services office. Learn more about what your college has to offer in terms of career planning for psychology.
3. Attend your school's events in psychology. Attend Psychology Club, Psi Chi and/or Psi Beta meetings and other psychology-related offerings where you can learn more about careers in the field.
4. Read available books.
5. Take advantage of online resources. These resources can help you to determine whether you would be well matched for a major and a career in psychology.
  - Watch online videos showcasing different careers in psychology
  - Play the Careers Interest Game.
  - Get more information about specific jobs in psychology from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the "Occupational Information Network" (O\*NET for short), or the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (OOH).
  - Visit the American Psychological Association and Association for Psychological Science websites. Become student affiliates of these organizations.

- Learn more about the national honor societies in psychology, Psi Chi and Psi Beta.

### What are some books that can help you to learn more about the major, careers, and graduate school in psychology?

American Psychological Association (2007). *Getting in: A step-by-step plan for gaining admission to graduate school in psychology* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

American Psychological Association (2011). *Graduate study in psychology, 2012 edition*. Washington, DC: Author.

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Kuther, T., & Morgan, R. D. (2010). *Careers in psychology: Opportunities in a changing world* (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Wadsworth Cengage.

Landrum, E. (2009). *Finding jobs with a psychology bachelor's degree: Expert advice for launching your career*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Morgan, B., & Korschgen, A. (2009). *Majoring in psychology? Career options for psychology undergraduates* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Schultheiss, D. E. P. (2008). *Psychology as a major: Is it right for me and what can I do with my degree?* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

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