



Career Paths in Psychology

There are a number of career paths you can follow with your degree in psychology. To give you some background in psychology-related fields, below are five potential areas you could pursue. In each of these paths, you can directly use what you are learning by earning your degree. These are not the only paths or occupations you can have with the psychology degree. This is just to give you some general ideas about directions you may want to go in!

Social & Human Services:

- Meeting human needs through an interdisciplinary knowledge base, focusing on prevention as well as remediation of problems, and maintaining a commitment to improving the overall quality of life of service populations
- Starting Salary: 20,000-40,000

Who you work with:

- Elderly
- Poverty stricken
- Juvenile delinquents
- Criminals
- Alcohol & substance abusers
- Mentally ill
- Developmentally delayed
- Chronic illness

Daily Duties:

- Assessing needs of clients
- Counseling
- Record keeping
- Networking with agencies that provide help/support for clients
- Referring clients to sources of help

Necessary Skills:

- Concern for others
- Detachment
- Ability to work within the system
- Flexibility
- Licensure/Certification
- Speak foreign languages

Recommended classes & experiences:

- PY204 Adolescent Psychology
- PY205 Psychology of Adulthood and Aging
- PY208 Abnormal Psychology
- PY305 Theories of Personality
- SW105 Introduction to Social Work
- HE160 Substance Use and Abuse
- SO 101 Introduction to Sociology
- FS101 Elementary Spanish
- CO120 Interpersonal Communication

*Internship with a nonprofit agency, federal/state governmental agency, religious organization or retirement home/community

Human Resources:

- The management of an organization's workforce; advocate of the business or corporation on topics like pay grades, job design, benefits administration, grievances
- Starting Salary: 38,000-43,000

Who you work with:

- company employees

Daily Duties:

- Professional development
- Organizational development
- Career development
- Employment placement
- Wage and salary administration
- Benefits administration
- Research and information management

Necessary Skills:

- Excellent communication (verbal & written)
- Public Presentation Skills
- Computer & software familiarity
- Data analysis

Recommended classes & experiences:

- PY 222 Industrial Psychology
- PY205 Psychology of Adulthood and Aging
- PY207 Social Psychology
- PY 305 Theories of Personality
- CO220 Public Speaking
- CO120 Interpersonal Communication
- BM250 Principles of Management & Organizational Behavior

*Internship in the human resources department of a company

Residential Care:

- Providing long-term care to adults or children in a residential setting
- Starting Salary: 21,000-36,000

Who you work with:

- Developmentally delayed
- Elderly
- Delinquent youth
- Substance abusers
- Abused women and children

Daily Duties:

- Provide care in a therapeutic atmosphere
- Counseling
- Teach living skills
- Skill development
- Help transition residents in & out of care
- Handle emergencies
- Public relations
- Staff & administration duties

Recommended classes & experiences:

- PY204 Adolescent Psychology
- PY205 Psychology of Adulthood and Aging
- PY208 Abnormal Psychology
- PY305 Theories of Personality
- SW105 Introduction to Social Work
- HE160 Substance Use and Abuse
- CO120 Interpersonal Communication

Therapy:

- Work with individuals and groups to promote optimum mental and emotional health. May help individuals deal with issues associated with addictions and substance abuse; family, parenting, and marital problems; stress management; self-esteem; and aging.
- Starting Salary: entry level varies widely depending on level of training

Daily Duties:

- Evaluate clients' physical or mental condition, based on review of client information
- Encourage clients to express their feelings and discuss their lives
- Help them to develop insight into themselves or their relationships
- Collect information about clients through interviews, observation, or tests
- Counsel clients or patients, individually or in group sessions
- Guide clients in the development of skills or strategies for dealing with their problems
- Develop and implement treatment plans based on clinical experience and knowledge
- Fill out and maintain client-related paperwork

Necessary Skills:

- Advanced degree
- Licensure and certification
- Work experience
- Patience
- Critical thinking
- Judgment and decision making
- Active listening
- Record keeping
- Ability to apply research to clinical work

Recommended classes & experiences:

- PY208 Abnormal Psychology
- PY 305 Theories of Personality
- PY401 Intro to Clinical Psychology
- PY431 Tests & Measurements
- PY401L Clinical Psychology Lab
- CJ330 Crisis Intervention
- HE160 Substance Use and Abuse
- SW105 Introduction to Social Work
- SW261 Diagnosing Mental Health Issues

*An internship or volunteer hours in the field of mental health (e.g., medical institutions, psychiatric facilities, rehabilitation centers, crisis hotlines, correctional facilities, or public/private mental health providers)

*A research assistantship

Professor:

- Teach courses in psychology on a post-secondary level. Includes both teachers primarily engaged in teaching and those who do a combination of teaching and research.
- Starting Salary: \$38,000 to \$46,000 with Ph.D.

Who you work with:

- Students
- Faculty
- Administration
- Various university services/offices
- Fellow faculty and researcher
- Parents

Daily Duties:

- Prepare course materials, deliver lectures
- Evaluate and grade students' class work and maintain student
- Plan, evaluate, and revise curricula, course content, course materials, and methods of instruction
- Keep current in the field by reading current literature & participating in professional conferences
- Research
- Writing
- Responding to student needs
- Service (department, institution & community)

Necessary Skills:

- Teaching Effectiveness
- Writing
- Interpersonal Communication
- Research skills
- Public Presentation Skills
- Deducting & inductive reasoning

Recommended classes & experiences:

- PY 207 Social Psychology
- PY 208 Abnormal Psychology
- PY 2xx Development Psychology
- PY 321 Qualitative Methods
- PY 302 Memory & Cognition
- PY 331 Psychology of Learning
- PY 370 Sensation and Perception
- PY 406 Intro to Neurosciences
- CO 220 Public Speaking
- CO 120 Interpersonal Communication

*As many psychology courses as possible

*A research assistantship

Psychology as a Background:

There are number of careers that a foundation in psychology will prepare you to pursue. You should let your advisor know you are considering a career in these areas so they can give you appropriate mentorship and advising. Here are just a few of those careers.

- Occupational Therapy
- Physical Therapy
- Genetic Counseling
- Lawyer
- Medical Doctor
- Ministry

Answering the Question “What Can I Do with this Major?”

Area: Human Services

- **Direct Care:**
 - Counseling
 - Psychotherapy
 - Art Therapy
 - Music Therapy
 - Case Management
 - Mental Health Services
- **Administration:**
 - Advocacy
 - Programming
 - Community Relations
- Physical Health and Wellness
- Crisis Work
- Rehabilitation Services
- Performance Enhancement
- Testing/Assessment
- Law Enforcement
- Management
- Development/Fund Raising
- Grant Writing

Employers:

- Federal government including Departments of:
 - Health and Human Services
 - Justice
 - Veterans Affairs
- State government including:
 - Departments of Human Services
 - Departments of Mental Health
 - Departments of Justice
- Community mental health centers
- State psychiatric hospitals
- Facilities for individuals with intellectual impairments
- Boards of probation and parole
- Local government
- Senior citizens' centers
- Nursing homes
- Social service/nonprofit organizations
- Religiously-affiliated service organizations
- Hospitals/healthcare providers
- Private psychiatric facilities
- Outpatient clinics
- Employee Assistance Programs (EAP)
- College and university counseling centers and career centers
- Pain clinics
- Rehabilitation facilities
- Testing centers
- Private practice

Information/Strategies:

- Obtain essential practical experience through part-time or summer jobs such as camp counselor, tutor, or resident hall advisor.
- Complete an internship for academic credit.
- Gain experience through volunteering with organizations such as crisis hotlines, Big Brother or Sister, Special Olympics, or service groups.

- Many entry-level helping positions require one year of related experience. Volunteer experience and internships can typically fulfill this requirement.
- Learn to work well with different types of people.
- Develop strong communication skills.
- Cultivate the desire to help others.
- Earn a minor in a specialized field of interest, e.g., social services or sociology.
- Take courses to build valuable counseling-related skills, e.g., techniques of counseling.
- Become fluent in a second language to serve clients who may not speak English.
- Be willing to relocate for increased job opportunities.
- Acquire knowledge of government and community resources available for those in need.
- Obtain a graduate degree in psychology, counseling, or social work for positions involving substantive counseling or psychotherapy or for advancement into administrative/supervisory positions.
- Many specialties exist at the graduate level, for example school counseling, mental health counseling, and counseling psychology. Pursue particular degrees depending upon interests and career goals. See General Information on the last page for more details on this topic.
- Pursue graduate training or certification programs to establish test administration and interpretation qualification.
- Maintain an excellent academic record and seek experiences valued by graduate programs.

Area: Research

- Social Research
- Market Research
- Data Analysis
- Testing/Test Development
- Experimental Psychology

Employers:

- Federal, state and local government agencies
- National headquarters of non-profit organizations
- Universities and colleges
- Market research firms
- Market research departments of consumer goods and manufacturing firms
- Private research organizations
- Consulting firms

Information/Strategies:

- Pursue research experience by working on faculty projects through independent study classes, as a student employee, or through other departmental programs.
- Take additional math and statistics courses to develop strong quantitative and statistical skills.
- Obtain related experience through part-time or summer jobs or internships with a market research firm.
- Get involved in the American Marketing Association.
- Earn a graduate degree in experimental psychology, educational psychology, statistics, or marketing depending upon interest area.

Area: Education:

- Teaching
- Adult Learning/Community Instruction, e.g., GED classes, life skills, and parenting
- Information/Library Science
- Higher Education Administration and Student Support Services including:
- Admissions
- Financial Aid
- Academic Advising
- Development
- Alumni Affairs
- International Education and Study Abroad
- Career Services
- Residence Life
- Student Activities and Greek Life
- Orientation
- Leadership
- Multicultural Affairs
- Recreational Sports

Employers:

- Public and private K-12 schools
- Colleges and universities
- Government agencies
- Federal Trio programs, e.g., Upward Bound,
- Nonprofit organizations, e.g., Project Grad
- College prep programs

Information/Strategies:

- Obtain a teaching certificate for public school positions. Multiple certifications will increase marketability. Seek guidance from the education department of your college.
- Earn a doctoral degree in psychology for post-secondary teaching.
- Pursue graduate training in information science for library positions.
- Get a master's degree in college student personnel, higher education administration for student affairs, or administrative positions.
- Maintain a high GPA and secure strong personal recommendations.
- Gain experience working with children, adolescents, or college students through tutoring or other volunteer positions.
- Acquire related experience on campus as a resident hall advisor, orientation leader, admissions tour guide, or peer mentor.
- Develop strong communication skills and learn to speak well in front of a group.

Area: Human Resources

- Employment and Recruitment
- Selection
- Labor Relations
- Compensation and Benefits
- Organizational Development
- Training

Employers:

- Large companies
- Government agencies
- Staffing and employment services
- Large non-profit organizations
- Hospitals
- Educational institutions

Information/Strategies:

- Gain relevant experience in human resources by completing an internship.
- Earn a minor in business or supplement curriculum with business courses.
- Seek leadership positions in student organizations.
- Develop strong computer skills.
- Earn an MBA or a graduate degree in human resources to attain higher level positions.

Area: Business and Industry

- Sales
- Customer Service
- Public Relations
- Marketing
- Advertising
- Product Design
- Management
- Insurance
 - Claims Management
 - Underwriting
- Real Estate
- Sales
- Property Management

Employers:

- Service providers
- Wholesalers
- Manufacturers
- Retail stores including:
 - Department stores
 - Specialty stores
 - Discount stores
- Super retailers
- Online retailers
- Call centers
- Financial institutions
- Insurance companies
- Real estate companies
- Property management firms

- Apartment complexes
- Public relations departments of large businesses or nonprofit organizations

Information/Strategies:

- Develop career goals and seek relevant experiences to prepare for those goals.
- Earn a minor in business or supplement curriculum with business or communication courses.
- Obtain relevant experience through internships or part-time jobs.
- Work a part-time or summer job in a retail store. Demonstrate a willingness to take on additional responsibilities such as “assistant manager”.
- Participate in student organizations and seek leadership roles.
- Learn to work well with different types of people. Develop a strong commitment to customer satisfaction.
- For sales, develop the ability to work well under pressure and be comfortable in a competitive environment.
- Be willing to start in a management-trainee program or other entry-level positions.
- When job searching, seek employers interested in hiring “any major”.
- Understand the top skills employers desire and be prepared to demonstrate them, such as communication (oral and written), computer, interpersonal, leadership, and teamwork.

General Information and Strategies:

- Psychology provides a broad, liberal arts background.
- Some students may choose to study psychology because they enjoy the subject but wish to pursue careers requiring “any major”. In this scenario, it is critical to develop desirable skills through internships, part-time or summer jobs, or volunteer experiences. Some skills valued most by employers include: communication, interpersonal, leadership, teamwork, and computer skills.
- Other students may major in psychology because they want to work in a related field. Many entry-level helping positions are available, however the amount of direct client contact is limited for those who have a bachelor’s degree. Students may wish to pursue graduate education in psychology, social work, counseling, college student personnel, or other related fields to increase opportunities and earning potential. Research career fields to learn what type of degree (master’s, educational specialist, doctoral) and subject area are most appropriate. The following list provides some examples:

Master’s Degree

Licensed Clinical Social Worker
Professional Counselor
Educational, Vocational, and School
Counselors

Substance Abuse and Behavioral Disorder
Counselors
Rehabilitation Counselors
Licensed Marriage & Family Therapists

Educational Specialist

School Psychologist

Doctoral Degree

Counseling Psychologist
Licensed Clinical Psychologist
Experimental Psychologist
Sport Psychologist
Industrial/Organizational Psychologist

Social Psychologist
Developmental Psychologist
Forensic Psychologist
Health Psychologist

- For those wishing to pursue graduate education, maintain a high grade point average, secure strong faculty recommendations, and gain experience through volunteer or work opportunities. Assist a faculty member with his or her research.
- Many applied positions require licensure. This can take an additional one to three years of supervised experience after earning a graduate degree depending upon state requirements. Graduate programs in

clinical work should be accredited by the American Psychological Association (APA) in order to ensure a smooth transition towards licensure. Graduate programs in counseling should be accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP).

Other Potential Resources:

- ✓ <http://whatcanidowiththismajor.com/major/psychology/>
- ✓ APA's website on careers in psychology:
<http://www.apa.org/careers/resources/guides/careers.aspx>
- ✓ Finding Jobs with a Psychology Bachelor's Degree: Expert Advice for Launching Your Career by R. Eric Landrum, PhD (ISBN: 978-1-4338-0437-3)
- ✓ [Career Paths in Psychology: Where Your Degree Can Take You](#) by Robert J. Sternberg, PhD (ISBN: 978-1-59147-732-7)