

# Pursuing a Psychology Career

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## THE PSYCHOLOGY MAJOR

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

Lots! As a psychology major, you will graduate with a scientific mindset 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. Here, you’ll find the 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?

To see if you would be well matched with a major in psychology, start by considering the questions below.

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 research methodology skills such as assessment and statistics?
- want to work in human or animal services?
- have a desire to apply psychological principles to understand or solve personal, social, organizational, 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 “Careers in Psychology” draws primarily from available U.S. data, its descriptions of psychology’s subfields and suggestions for preparing to enter the profession are applicable to students in many other countries.

### How popular is the psychology major?

Psychology is a very popular major. In 2014-2015, psychology was the fourth most popular major—6 percent of all degrees conferred. Business (19 percent), social science and history (11 percent), and health professions and related programs (8 percent) occupied the top three spots [National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2016a]. In 2015, more than 117,000 psychology majors graduated with a bachelor’s degree from U.S. colleges and universities (NCES, 2016a) (FIGURE 1).

Given that this number has been steadily increasing since 1970 (NCES, 2016a), it is very likely that psychology will remain a popular major among undergraduate students. The popularity of psychology is observed at the graduate level as well. Over the last decade, the number of graduate degrees in psychology has increased dramatically—by 32 percent at the master’s level and 54 percent at the doctoral level (APA Center for Workplace Studies, 2015) (FIGURE 2). As of 2013, of the 2.5 million workers whose highest degree was in psychology, approximately 1.4 million of them held a bachelor’s degree (Christidis, Lin, & Stamm, 2016).

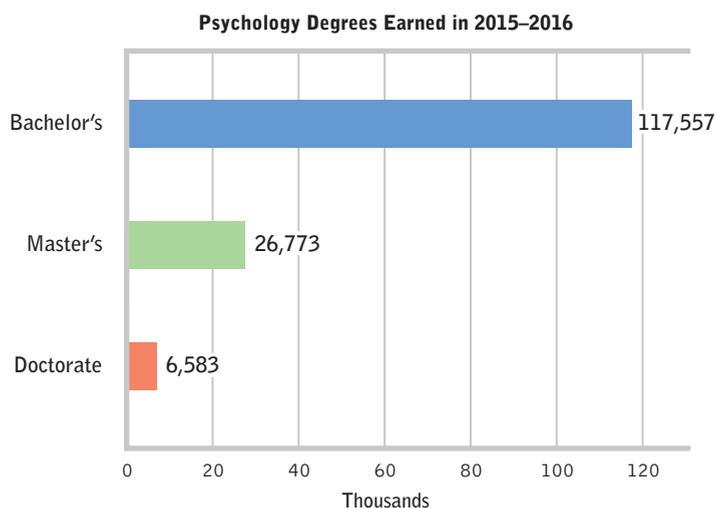
### Who is studying psychology at the undergraduate and graduate levels?

In 2015, a full 77 percent of the graduating psychology majors with bachelor’s degrees were women. In that same year, approximately 79 percent of master’s degree recipients were women (NCES, 2016b), and 75 percent of doctorate recipients were women (NCES, 2016c). Although 75 percent of all psychology doctorate recipients in 2015 were Caucasian, since 2005, the racial/ethnic diversity of doctorate recipients has grown, with a 12 percent increase among Black/African Americans, a 36 percent increase among Hispanic/Latinos, and a 46 percent increase among Asians (Christidis, Stamm, & Lin, 2016).

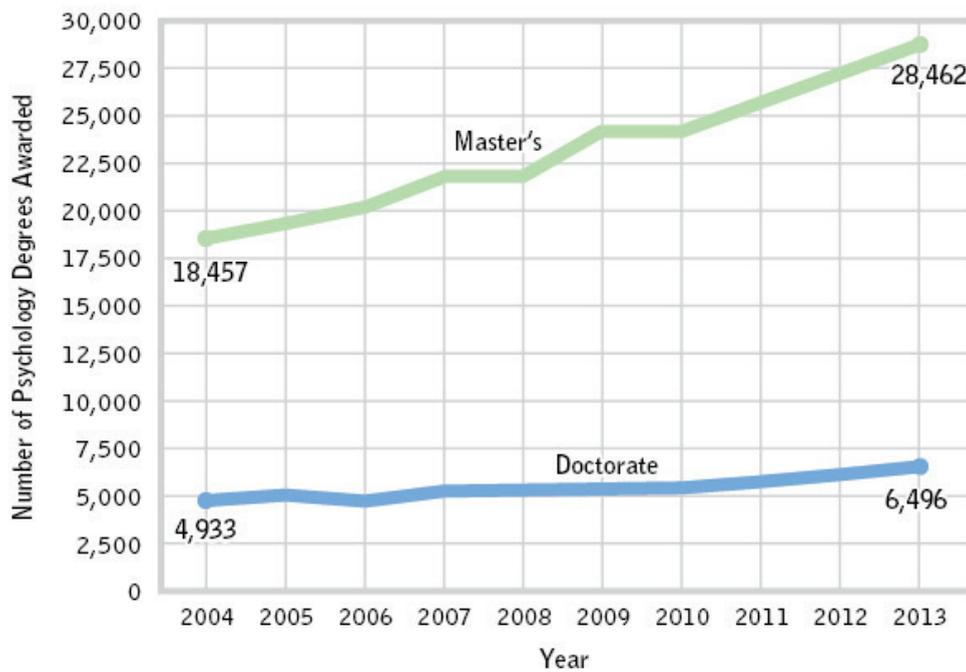
### What are the main reasons that undergraduate students choose to study psychology?

One study found that the number one reason psychology majors chose their major was a positive experience in their Introduction to Psychology class (Marrs, Barb, & Ruggiero,

**FIGURE 1** Number of Psychology Degrees Conferred by Level of Degree: 2015-2016 (Data from NCES, 2016a, 2016d, 2016e.)



**FIGURE 2** Number of Psychology Master's and Doctoral Degrees Awarded by Year: 2004–2013 (Data from APA Center for Workplace Studies, 2015.)



2007). Other research has found that the top five reasons students choose a psychology major are that it provides the ability to help others, incorporates interesting subject matter, produces a better understanding of self and others, includes good career or salary potential, and offers the ability to conduct research (Mulvey & Grus, 2010).

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

The wide range of skills that psychology majors develop makes this major a “premier choice” for versatile career preparation (Halonen, 2014). This skill set is guided by the American Psychological Association (APA)’s learning goals and outcomes for psychology majors (**FIGURE 3**).

Across all occupations, the skill set that twenty-first-century employers value includes social perceptiveness, reading comprehension, critical thinking, and speaking and active listening skills (Carnevale & Smith, 2014). These skills align with APA’s learning goals and outcomes (**FIGURE 3**), which means that psychology majors will be well prepared for numerous professional opportunities and a range of graduate training options. In addition to exceptional interpersonal and communication skills, psychology majors develop 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 mindset 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 APA style.

**FIGURE 3** APA Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major: Learning Goals and Outcomes (APA, 2013. For complete Guidelines, see [apa.org/ed/precollege/about/psymajor-guidelines.aspx](http://apa.org/ed/precollege/about/psymajor-guidelines.aspx))



## CAREER OPTIONS WITH A DEGREE IN PSYCHOLOGY

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

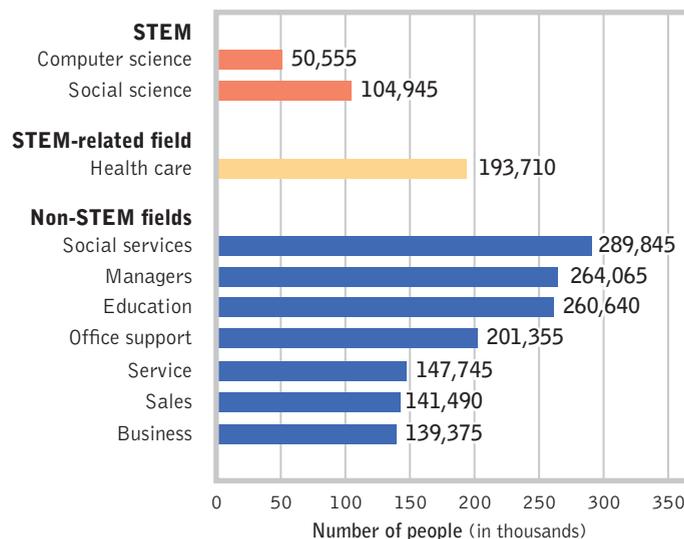
A psychology major will prepare you for many possible career paths. About 40 percent of students with a bachelor's degree in psychology attend graduate school or receive professional training, which means the majority of psychology majors will be in the job market after graduation (Halonen, 2014). About 10 percent of Americans with a psychology bachelor's degree work in STEM occupations (science, technology, engineering, and math), with over half of that group working in the social sciences. Another 10 percent work in STEM-related occupations, with most of that group working in health care (Christidis, Stamm, & Lin, 2015) (FIGURE 4). The remaining 80 percent work in non-STEM fields (Christidis, Stamm, & Lin, 2015). Most individuals with a bachelor's degree in psychology find work in business administration, sales, or education (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015), with many others working in public affairs, the service industries, and computer programming (APA, n.d.). Popular occupations include employment counselor, interviewer, personnel analyst, probation officer, or writer (APA, n.d.). 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, 2015).

A second option for psychology majors after graduation is to pursue a graduate master's or doctorate degree in psychology. (More on this below.)

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

Drew Appleby provides a list of 300 careers that would be of interest to psychology majors (2016)—including those pursuing advanced degrees. The list includes links for more information about professional responsibilities, salaries, and job outlook for each of these positions.

**FIGURE 4** Where Do People Work with a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology? (Data from Christidis, Stamm, & Lin, 2015.)



According to 2013 data from the National Science Foundation, careers paths differ depending on the type of psychology degree that individuals received (**FIGURE 5**). For example, about half of individuals with *graduate degrees* in psychology worked in professional services, which include positions in health care, financial and legal services, and counseling. In comparison, whereas some individuals with a *bachelor's* in psychology worked in professional services, many of them worked in sales, management/supervision, and other work fields (Stamm, Lin, & Christidis, 2016).

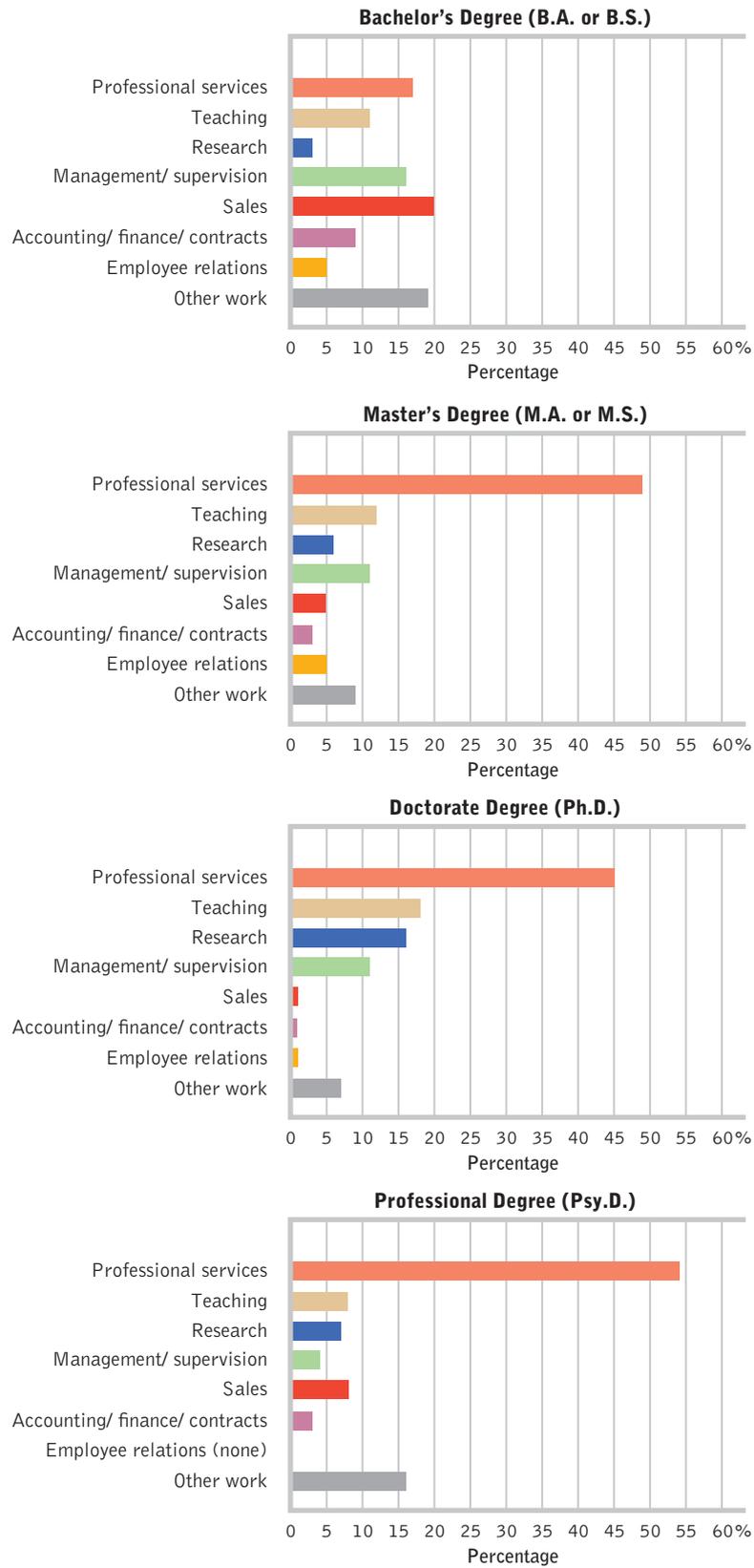
### How can you maximize your ability to get a job after graduating with a major in psychology?

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 ambitions, 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. Your school's Career Services can help you identify and market your job skills and emphasize your knowledge and abilities in your resume. They can also help you to network with other alumni who are working in your area of interest who can help you to prepare for the career that you want. I've included some other helpful online resources at the end of this document.
- 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 network of mentors who can provide supervision and support for your career goals as well as letters of endorsement 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 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. This will also show prospective employers that your specific interests are in line with the demands of the job.

If you work hard now and plan ahead, you may be able to avoid regrets later. A Pew Research study asked college graduates whether (1) studying more, (2) starting their job search earlier, (3) choosing a different major, or (4) gaining more job experience during college would have helped them to get a better job (Pew Research Center, 2014). About three quarters of the group reported that doing at least one of one of these things would indeed have helped them to earn a better job. Graduates' number one regret? Not getting enough job experience during college.

**FIGURE 5** Where Do People Work with Varying Psychology Degrees?



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

In 2013, the average *starting* salary for a BA degree recipient was \$35,108 (NCES, 2015). By comparison, the 2013 average starting salary for master's degree recipients was \$51,935, and for doctoral recipients was \$53,458 (NCES, 2015). In this same year, the median salary for full time, doctoral level psychologists was \$80,000 (Lin, Christidis, & Stamm, 2017). The highest salaries were for individuals with doctorates in general psychology (\$110,000) and industrial/organizational psychology (\$108,000), with the lowest salaries for individuals with doctorates in educational psychology (\$73,000). Psychologists with a doctoral (Ph.D.) degree had a higher median salary than those with a professional (Psy. D.) degree (\$84,000 vs. \$70,000) (Lin, Christidis, & Stamm, 2017). Across a lifetime, individuals with a psychology bachelor's are expected to earn \$2,001,000, whereas individuals with a doctorate in psychology are expected to earn \$3,157,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012) (**FIGURE 6**). Clearly, earnings tend to increase with education, and higher levels of education will almost always yield greater financial rewards over the course of a career (Carnevale, 2016).

Among early career psychologists, clinical neuropsychologists reported the highest median first year salary of \$72,500, followed by clinical child psychologists (\$65,850), and clinical psychologists and industrial/organizational psychologists (both \$65,000) (Doran, Kraha, Marks, Ameen, & El-Ghoroury, 2016).

Psychologists rank number seven (tied with medical scientists) among the top-paying occupations for those with doctoral degrees. The lifetime salary in 2009 dollars was \$2,515,000 for graduate level psychologists, compared to the average lifetime salary for all doctoral occupations of \$3,252,000 (Carnevale, Rose, & Cheah, 2011).

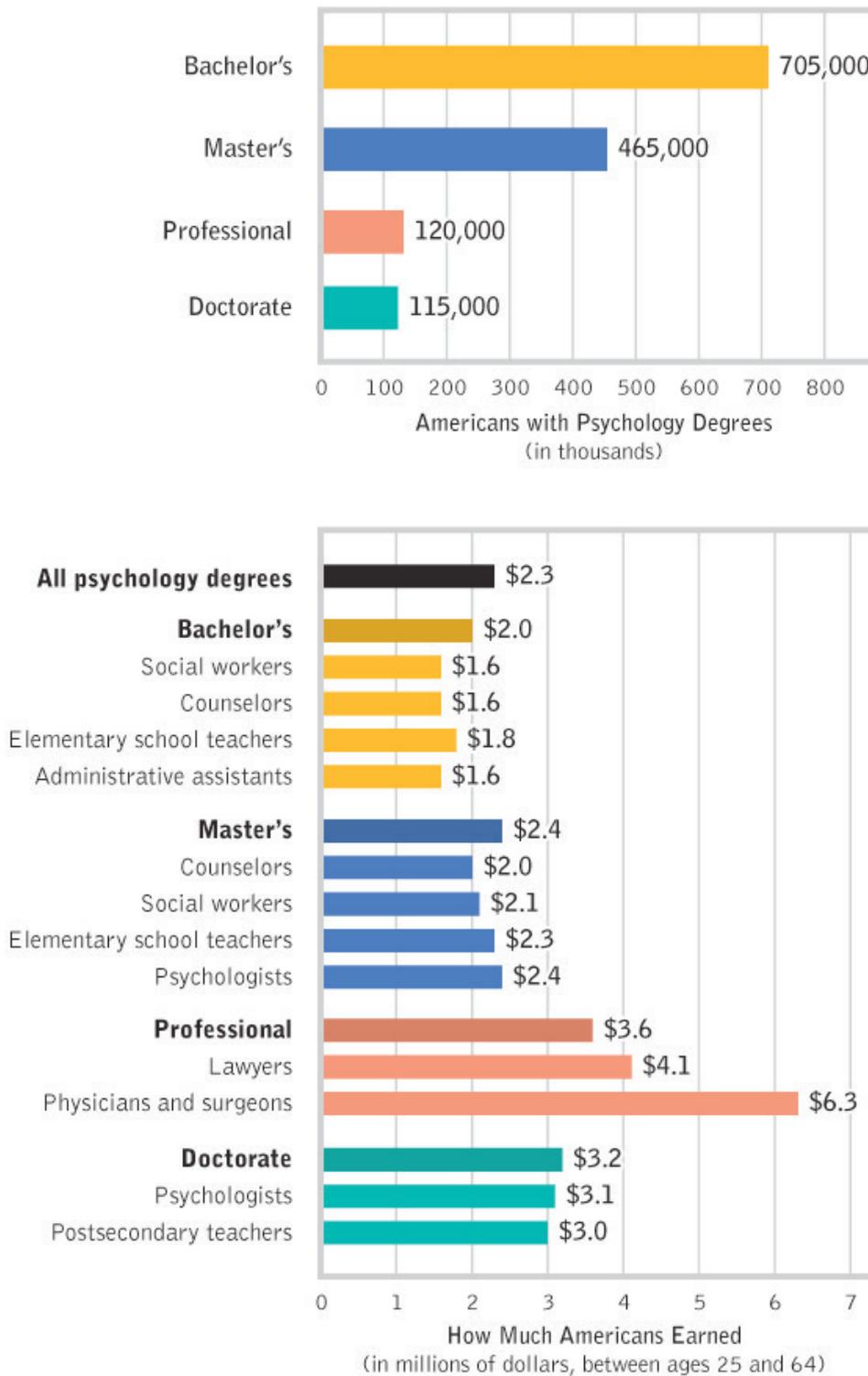
Of course, earning potential should not be the only reason that individuals choose a major. Job satisfaction is another important consideration.

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

In 2015, an impressive 88 percent of U.S. employees reported that they were overall satisfied with their jobs, marking the highest level of job satisfaction in the last 15 years (Society for Human Resources Management, 2016). In a study of 27,000 Americans, the most satisfying jobs were 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 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).

High levels of job satisfaction have also been observed among individuals who attend graduate school in psychology. In 2009, a full 72 percent of new doctoral recipients indicated that their primary occupation 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 et al., 2011).

**FIGURE 6 U.S. Census: Pathways After a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology** (Data from U.S. Census Bureau, 2012.)



## POSTGRADUATE DEGREES

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

If you choose to earn a graduate degree in psychology, you will be in good company. About 45 percent of those with a bachelor's degree in psychology or social work go on to graduate school (Carnevale, Cheah, & Hanson, 2015). Those with graduate degrees in psychology earn 33 percent more, on average, than psychology majors with only a bachelor's degree ("By the numbers," 2016). 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. Also, individuals with the highest degrees in psychology have the highest rates of full time employment (Christidis, Lin, & Stamm, 2016).

Job prospects in the field of psychology are much better for individuals with graduate degrees. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015), job prospects will be best for those in clinical, counseling, or school psychology positions for candidates with a doctoral or education specialist degree and post-doctoral work experience. Individuals with a master's degree will still face keener competition for positions in psychology than those with a doctoral degree.

Employment for psychologists is expected to grow 19 percent from 2014 to 2024, which is faster than average for all occupations. Employment will grow because of increased demand for psychological services in schools, hospitals, social service agencies, and mental health centers (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015).

### 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 increase your job opportunities in the field of psychology beyond the bachelor's degree.

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 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.

It will take more time to complete a doctoral degree in psychology, relative to a master's degree. Among graduates who earned a research doctorate (Ph.D.) in psychology in 2013, the average time to degree completion was 7 years after starting graduate school, or 8.3 years after finishing their bachelor's degree (Lin, Green, Stamm, & Christidis, 2017). The doctoral 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 becoming a practicing clinician. 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. Many psychologists who earn a Ph.D. in clinical or counseling psychology conduct research and practice as psychotherapists. 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. It is important to note, however, that psychologists with Psy.D. degrees are not the only ones who work as psychotherapists; some types of counselors and therapists may practice with only master's degrees.

**FIGURE 7** lists by subfield the Ph.D.s earned in the United States in 2012, the most recent year for which these data are available. Among the doctorates awarded in the 2011–2012 academic year, the most popular subfield was clinical psychology, followed by general psychology. Of these doctorates, the majority were classified as research/scholarship (74 percent), with fewer designated as professional practice (24 percent) or other types (1 percent) (APA Center for Workplace Studies, 2014).

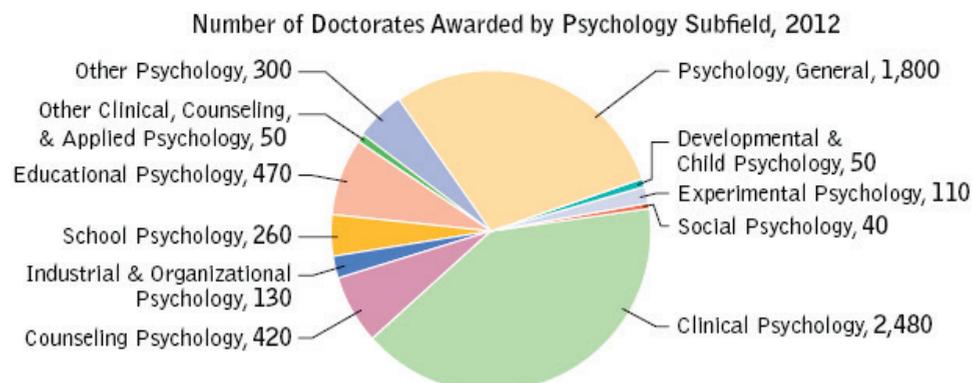
### What are some of the subfields of psychology?

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 APA has 54 active divisions (**FIGURE 8**). The following paragraphs (arranged alphabetically) describe some careers in the main specialty areas of psychology, most of which require a graduate degree in psychology.

**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 often provide therapy but may also 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, correctional facilities, nonprofit organizations, 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

**FIGURE 7** Psychology Degrees Awarded by Subfield, 2012 (Data from National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System [IPEDS], 2012 Completion Survey.)



**FIGURE 8** APA Divisions by Number and Name

1. Society for General Psychology	29. Society for the Advancement of Psychotherapy
2. Society for the Teaching of Psychology	30. Society of Psychological Hypnosis
3. Society for Experimental Psychology and Cognitive Science	31. State, Provincial, and Territorial Psychological Association Affairs
4. <i>There is no active Division 4.</i>	32. Society for Humanistic Psychology
5. Quantitative and Qualitative Methods	33. Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities/Autism Spectrum Disorders
6. Society for 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. Society for Health Psychology
11. <i>There is no active Division 11.</i>	39. Psychoanalysis
12. Society of Clinical Psychology	40. Society for 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 Couple and 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 Culture, Ethnicity, and Race
18. Psychologists in Public Service	46. Society for Media Psychology and Technology
19. Society for Military Psychology	47. Society for Sport, Exercise, and Performance 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. Society for 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

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, and intelligence. 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 promote psychological health by enhancing environmental settings—focusing on preventive measures and crisis intervention, with special attention to the problems of underserved groups and minority groups. Some community psychologists collaborate with professionals in other areas, such as public health, with a shared emphasis on prevention. As a community psychologist, your work settings could include federal, state, and local departments of mental health, corrections, and welfare. 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. Although similar to clinical psychologists, 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 them use their own skills, interests, and abilities to cope during transitions. 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, psychological, cognitive, and social 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 child-care reform, maternal and child health, and attachment and adoption. You would probably specialize in a specific stage of the life span, such as 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** are interested in the psychological processes involved in learning. They study the relationship between learning and our physical and social environments, and they develop strategies for enhancing the learning process. As an educational psychologist, working in a university psychology department or 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.

**Environmental psychologists** study the interaction of individuals with their natural and built (urban) environments. They are interested in how we influence and are affected by these environments. As an environmental psychologist, you might study wildlife conservation, the impact of urbanization on health, or cognitive factors involved in sustainable lifestyle choices. Environmental psychologists tend to address these kinds of questions by working with other professionals (e.g., sociologists, architects, environmental studies professionals) as part of an interdisciplinary team. As an environmental psychologist, you might work in a consulting firm, an academic setting, the nonprofit sector, or the government.

**Experimental psychologists** are a diverse group of scientists who investigate a variety of basic behavioral processes in humans and other animals. Prominent areas of 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 interests and training. Experimental research methods are not limited to the field of experimental psychology; 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. Or you might be employed by a research institution, zoo, business, 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 consult on jury selection and deliberation processes. They also provide assessment to assist the legal community. Although most forensic psychologists are clinical psychologists, many have expertise in other areas of psychology, such as social or cognitive psychology. Some also hold law degrees. 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, prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections, or treat psychosocial problems associated with chronic and terminal illnesses. 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 an organizational 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 business, industry, the government, or a college or university. Or you may be self-employed as a consultant or work for a management consulting 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 central nervous system disorders, such as Alzheimer's disease or stroke. You might also evaluate individuals for evidence of head injuries; learning and developmental disabilities, such as autism spectrum disorder; and other psychiatric disorders, such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). If you are a *clinical neuropsychologist*, you might work in a hospital's neurology, neurosurgery, or psychiatric unit. 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 psychometric psychologist 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 likely be employed by a university or college, a testing company, a private research firm, or a 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, market research, or other applied psychology fields, including social neuroscience. Some social psychologists work for hospitals, federal agencies, social networking sites, or businesses performing applied research.

**Sport psychologists** study the psychological factors that influence, and are influenced by, participation in sports and other physical activities. Their professional activities 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 athletes with psychological problems, such as anxiety or substance-abuse, that might interfere with optimal performance. As a sport psychologist, if you were not working in an academic or research setting, you would most likely work as part of a team or an organization or in a private capacity.

## PREPARING EARLY FOR GRADUATE STUDY IN PSYCHOLOGY

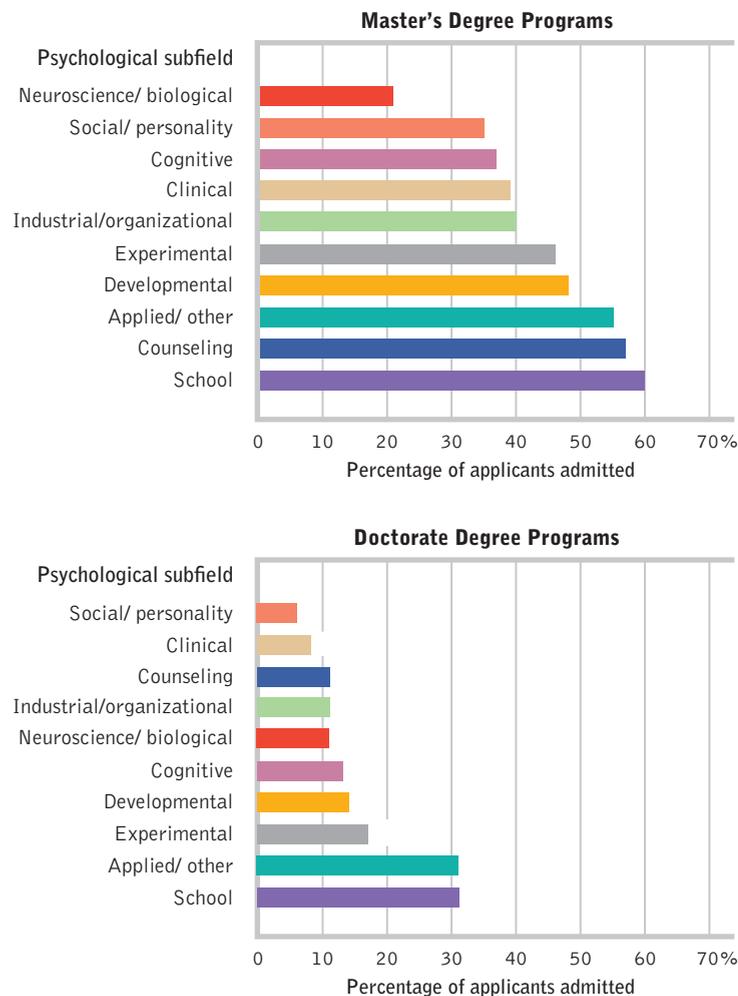
### How can you best prepare for graduate study in psychology?

Competition for the openings in psychology graduate programs is keen, as shown in **FIGURE 9**. During the 2014–2015 academic year, doctoral program acceptance rates averaged about 14 percent. Of the 74,422 applications submitted to doctoral programs that year, the two most popular subfields were for training in counseling services, namely clinical psychology (56 percent) and counseling psychology (7 percent). By comparison, of the 28,192 applications submitted to master’s programs that year, the two most popular subfields were counseling psychology (31 percent) and industrial/organizational psychology (13 percent). The acceptance rate for U.S. master’s programs was higher than for doctoral programs, with just over half (51 percent) of all applicants accepted by master’s programs during the 2014-2015 school year (Michalski, Cope, & Fowler, 2016).

### 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 2014, about 78 percent of doctorate recipients reported some debt from their graduate training. Among graduates who reported doctoral-level

**FIGURE 9** Acceptance rates for Master’s and Doctorate degree programs



graduate debt, those who received a Psy.D. reported a median debt of \$138,000 whereas those receiving a Ph.D. reported a median debt of \$67,000 (Michalski, Cope, & Fowler, 2016). Graduates reported that the most commonly received forms of financial support were federal loans (73.7 percent), followed by income from university employment or graduate assistantships (66.3 percent) (Doran et al., 2016). About 40 percent of respondents who received a Ph.D. reported having university employment or a graduate assistantship, which was true for only 2 percent of Psy.D. respondents. Individuals with Ph.D.s also reported more university scholarships/fellowships (12.5 percent vs. 2 percent of Psy.D. respondents) and external grants or fellowships (3.4 percent vs. 0.8 percent of Psy.D. respondents) (Doran et al., 2016).

### What can you do to increase your chances of acceptance 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 will be especially helpful when you apply to graduate school or for a job, 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 will help you connect with other students who have similar interests and expose you 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. Consider 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, which will test your interest in academic careers and build your skills for future study in psychology.
3. **Volunteer or get a job in a psychology-related field.** Getting involved in this way will demonstrate 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 those required for work and school—an important skill for graduate school success.
4. **Maintain good grades and prepare early for the GRE.** Demonstrate your ability to do well in graduate school by successfully completing challenging undergraduate 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. This includes 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 or university's Career Services office. Learn more about what your school has to offer in terms of career planning for psychology.
3. Attend your school's events in psychology. Attend Psychology Club, Psi Chi, or Psi Beta meetings, and other psychology-related offerings where you can learn more about careers in the field.
4. Read available books. (See list below).
5. Take advantage of online resources, which 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 Career Interest Game.
  - Get more information about specific jobs in psychology from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Occupational Information Network (O\*NET), or the Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH).
  - Visit the American Psychological Association and Association for Psychological Science websites. Become a student affiliate of these organizations.
  - Learn more about the national honor societies in psychology, Psi Chi and Psi Beta.
  - Visit APA's Psych Learning Curve blog.
  - Develop an Individual Development Plan.

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

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Hettich, P., & Landrum, R. E. (2014). *Your undergraduate degree in psychology: From college to career*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

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Silvia, P. J., Delaney, P. F., & Marcovitch, S. (2016). *What psychology majors could (and should) be doing: A guide to research experience, professional skills, and your options after college* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

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