



SIXTH EDITION

# **The Psychology Major**

Career Options and  
Strategies for Success

**R. Eric Landrum**  
**Stephen F. Davis**



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for Success

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# Preface

These feel like turbulent times. And we don't think it really matters when you are reading this, or when we are writing this. It feels turbulent, whether you are thinking about your future, thinking about the economy, thinking about politics (whatever your beliefs are). As a scientist, having data we can trust, have current, up-to-date information is comforting; however, we still have to use our own judgment, leverage our critical thinking skills, and draw our own conclusions, but thinking like a scientist—that is, thinking like a psychological scientist—definitely has its advantages in times of turmoil.

No matter where you are in your undergraduate career, whether you are in the exploration stage, the career pursuit stage, the skill development stage—or you are hovering over some of these stages simultaneously—we have written and revised this book to be practical and inspirational. Our goal for this sixth edition continues to be to provide strategies for success that will allow students to achieve their career goals, whatever they may be. Also, we wanted to provide some fundamental tips and advice that can be useful to all students, but especially useful for psychology majors. Honestly, this book is all about you, and promoting your academic health and career exploration—It is always a pleasure to get a chance to update our work, and here's what new to this edition:

- In our previous edition, not every chapter had an end-of-chapter exercise. In this 6<sup>th</sup> edition of *The Psychology Major*, every chapter has two end-of-chapter exercises.
- In the previous edition, some chapters contained the personal Success Story feature, others did not. In this 6<sup>th</sup> edition, every chapter contains a Success Story, and all the Success Stories throughout the entire book are all new.
- When we revised the book previously from the 4<sup>th</sup> edition to the 5<sup>th</sup> edition in 2014, of course we updated the information through the references cited, adding 85 new citations at that time; for this upgrade from the 5<sup>th</sup> edition to the 6<sup>th</sup> edition, we are adding 166 new citations to the book.
- We have added an entirely new chapter on Student Self-Care (Chapter 11). The toll on a college student's physical and mental health is real, and we believe that it is pertinent to address these issues in a text that is focused on strategies for success for all psychology majors. It seems prudent to provide some evidence-informed advice on self-care.

We are indeed thankful to so many of our colleagues who adopt this book for their courses and tell us about it when we see them at conferences. With the continuing growth in the popularity of psychology, a chance to update the resources and statistics is always welcome. Also, a revision gives us a chance to continue to add to our collective knowledge base about these topics, hopefully making this book more valuable to the students and to our colleagues.

Our basic approach to writing this book was to provide immediately useful and helpful information to students majoring in psychology or thinking about majoring in psychology. The approach of this book is applied—to provide students with practical, timely, up-to-date information that helps them. This text standardizes and catalogs much of the practical advice that professors often give to students on a one-to-one basis—this book does not replace that interaction, but it helps to supplement it. We encourage students to “get their hands dirty” by engaging with the content by completing both of the exercises at the end of each chapter. We hope that students will be inspired by the Success Story (all new) that is presented in every chapter. We hope this will be a one-stop shop for advice about the psychology major, discipline, job market, and employment strategies. We provide tips on how to do well in all classes, how to find research ideas and use PsycINFO and Web of Science, and how to write papers in APA format. Also, the book contains up-to-date career information that faculty might not normally have at their fingertips, including the latest salary figures for a number of psychology-related jobs and occupations. Other benefits include the coverage of ethics for undergraduate students, sections on self-reflection, and an overview of disciplines related to psychology. These features are important perspectives that may not often be shared with the new or prospective psychology major.

We hope this book might be one of the first books that an undergraduate student keeps for his or her own professional library. Specifically, this book makes a good supplemental text for research methods/experimental psychology courses, any capstone course, introductory courses, careers courses, etc. The unique mix and coverage of topics makes this text useful in a variety of teaching situations. Quite frankly, because of the wide variety of topics covered and expert advice offered, we believe that these are some of the key reasons why this volume has thrived for 20 years, and now is presented to you in a 6<sup>th</sup> edition.

Projects such as this one do not occur in a vacuum. We would like to thank all the many talented individuals



and teams at Pearson for seeing the value and potential in a sixth edition of the book. We also want to thank our colleagues who have helped shape the direction of this sixth edition—whether through formal reviews, e-mails, conversations at conferences, etc.—you have greatly helped confirm the value and necessity of such a book. We would like to thank the following reviewers: Douglas Engwall, *Central Connecticut State University*; Erinn Green, *Wilmington College*; Katherine Hooper, *University of North Florida*; Andrea Lassiter, *Minnesota State University, Mankato*; Greg Loviscky,

*Penn State*; Mary Anne Taylor, *Clemson University*; and Patti Tolar, *University of Houston & UH-Downtown*.

Finally, we dedicate this book to our students—past, present, and future—our students are *the* reason we wrote the book, and it continues to be our honor and privilege to teach and profess in a manner that positively influences others' lives. Thank *you* for allowing *us* to maximize the opportunity.

R.E.L. & S.F.D.

# Chapter 1

# Why College?



## Learning Objectives

- 1.1 Explain how college demand has changed over time
- 1.2 Describe the benefits of a college education
- 1.3 Identify the basic skills and competencies most useful in the labor force
- 1.4 Determine the personal and social benefits of a liberal arts education
- 1.5 Relate college education to financial status
- 1.6 Compare job and educational alternatives to college

There is a disconnect, a churn, a feeling of anxiety that seems pervasive in higher education today. The sources of this discontent are complex, and they contribute to the complicated answer of “why college?” There are still positive perceptions about the need for college and how a bachelor’s degree can facilitate success in the workplace. In a poll conducted in 2013, 70% of American adults indicated that a college education is ‘very important;’ in 1970, 36% of American adults answered ‘very important’ (Newport & Busteed, 2013). So, the good news is that a college degree is still viewed positively. But in other news:

- Major industries are reporting an inability to grow and compete. In one instance, 49% having unfilled job openings, translating to 37% of companies unable to take on new business (U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 2017).
- In a report on the skills gap between what companies need and value and what new graduates possess, one example cited is that 96% of chief academic officers believed that their own U.S. institutions were ‘very effective’ or ‘somewhat effective’ at preparing students for the workforce, whereas 11% of business leaders strongly agree (Gallup, 2017).
- Of employed U.S. adults with a bachelor’s degree, only 26% strongly agree that their education is relevant to their work and their daily life. Why does this matter? Because relevance is a positive predictor of value and quality (of the education received), and relevance is related to well-being (Strada Education Network and Gallup, 2018).
- “The old rules of thumb no longer apply. Go to college. Get good grades. Get a degree. Get a job. This is great advice that has served many generations well. However, these simple principles are no longer enough in today’s more complex world. The relationship between education after high school and jobs has become trickier are harder to navigate” (Carnevale et al., 2017, p. 1).

The mixed messages are abundant. A college education is still thought to be very important but might not be enough to get a good job. Colleges and universities think they

are doing a great job with their new graduates, but some employers of those graduates do not seem to agree. The ease of gaining employment a generation ago with a college degree appears to no longer exist today. It does appear that the collegiate terrain is more challenging in the present day—let the advice we provide throughout this book be your added advantage to success. Combined, your authors have over half a century of experience in higher education, and you will see throughout this text that we cite current research as often as possible to give you the best possible advice for making informed decisions about your future.

## The Popularity of College and Why Attend College?

### 1.1 Explain how college demand has changed over time

Overall, the demand for a college education continues to grow, despite any recent rising levels of anxiety or churn (Carnevale et al., 2017). There are a number of indicators that demonstrate this growth; see Table 1.1 for a comparison of changes in a 65-year span (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017a).

You can see for yourself the tremendous growth over time—and we have not even started to address growth within the psychology major. With all of the competition in college, it is interesting to note the most popular reasons that students report going to college. In a study commissioned by the New American Education Policy Program, the top reasons for prospective students to indicate they want to go to college (a combination of the percentage “very important” and percentage “important” responses) were (a) to improve my employment opportunities (91%), (b) to make more money (90%), (c) to get a good job (89%), (d) to learn more about a favorite topic or area of interest (85%), (e) to become a better person (81%), (f) to improve my self-confidence (76%), and (g) to learn more about the world (74%) (Fishman, 2015).

We wrote this book to help you make the most of your undergraduate education to maximize your opportunities for future success, whatever that route may be. With this number of people attending and completing college, how will you stand out? Given that you know what is important to you as you start college, how will you carry that forward and achieve your goals? If you follow our advice, you will know what to do to work toward achieving your goals and to stand out from the crowd.

**Table 1.1** Historical Changes in U.S. Higher Education, 1949–1950 to 2014–2015

	1949–1950	2014–2015
Number of Institutions	1,851	4,627
Total Number of Faculties	246,722	1,551,000
Total Enrollment Fall Semester	2,444,900	20,207,369
Number of Bachelor's Degrees Conferred	432,058	1,894,934
Number of Master's Degrees Conferred	58,183	758,708
Number of Doctoral Degrees Conferred	6,420	178,547

**SOURCE:** National Center for Education Statistics. (2017a). Historical summary of faculty, enrollment, degrees conferred, and finances in degree-granting postsecondary institutions: Selected years, 1869-70 through 2014-15 [Table 301.20]. *Digest of Education Statistics*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16\\_301.10.asp?current=yes](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16_301.10.asp?current=yes)

# Broad Benefits of College Beyond a Paycheck

## 1.2 Describe the benefits of a college education

There are clear reasons why so many Americans pursue a college education; they not only acquire knowledge and skills that augment lifelong learning but also these undergraduate experiences usually lead to employment opportunities and enhanced income. The details of these directly tangible benefits to a college education are presented later in this chapter. However, it is important to realize that there are broader beneficial effects accompanying a college education beyond a paycheck.

Based on data accumulated in 2012, Torstel (2015) calculated the benefits of having a bachelor's degree (with no additional graduate training) as compared to individuals who graduated from high school but never attended college. See Table 1.2 for the benefits (Torstel, 2015, pp. 1–2):

Of course, the types of studies that lead to these conclusions are correlational studies, meaning that these are not cause-and-effect conclusions. That is, going to college is not a guarantee of the outcomes presented in Table 1.2. However, when studied over

**Table 1.2** Broad Earnings Benefits of College Completion Compared to High School Completion

- Annual earnings are about \$32,000 (134%) higher. Moreover, there is no evidence that the college earnings premium is declining. Indeed, it has been increasing.
- Lifetime earnings are, conservatively, about \$625,000 (114%) greater in present discounted value (using a 3%-real interest rate and taking forgone earnings while in college into account).
- The incidence of poverty is 3.5 times lower.
- The likelihood of having health insurance through employment is 47% higher. Annual additional compensation in the form of employer contributions for health insurance is \$1,400 (74% greater).
- The likelihood of having a retirement plan through employment is 72% greater. Retirement income is 2.4 times higher.
- Job safety is greater. The incidence of receiving workers' compensation is 2.4 times lower.
- Measures of occupational prestige are significantly higher.
- The probability of being employed is 24% higher.
- The likelihood of being unemployed is 2.2 times lower.
- The likelihood of being out of the labor force (neither employed nor unemployed) is 74% less.
- Age at retirement is higher. The probability of being retired between the ages 62 and 69 is about 25% lower.
- The likelihood of reporting health to be very good or excellent is 44% greater.
- The likelihood of being a regular smoker is 3.9 times lower. The incidence of obesity and heavy drinking are significantly lower. The likelihood of exercising, having a healthy diet, wearing seat belts, and seeking preventative medical care are significantly higher.
- The incidence of a disability making it difficult to live independently is 3.6 times lower.
- Life expectancy at age 25 is seven years longer (for those having at least some college compared to those never having gone to college).
- Asset income is 4.9 times greater (\$1,900 more per year).
- The likelihood of not having a bank account is 8.1 times lower. Reliance on expensive forms of banking and credit is significantly lower.
- The probability of being in prison or jail is 4.9 times lower.
- The probability of being married is 21% higher and the probability of being divorced or separated is 61% lower.
- The likelihood of being happy is significantly higher.

**SOURCE:** Torstel, P. (2015, October 14). It's not just the money: The benefits of college education to individuals and to society. *Lumina Issue Papers*. Indianapolis, IN: Lumina Foundation. Retrieved from <https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/its-not-just-the-money.pdf>

**Table 1.3** Broad Societal Benefits of College Completion Compared to High School Completion

- Although the evidence is not completely conclusive, the positive effect on the aggregate earnings of others appears to be roughly similar to the effect on own earnings.
- Lifetime taxes are, conservatively, \$273,000 (215%) greater in present discounted value (using a 3%-real interest rate and taking into account forgone taxes while in college). That is, college graduates contribute hundreds of thousands of dollars more toward government services and social insurance programs.
- Lifetime government expenditures are about \$81,000 (39%) lower in present value. College graduates rely much less on other taxpayers.
- The lifetime total fiscal effect is roughly \$355,000 in present value.
- Crime is significantly lower.
- Volunteering is 2.3 times more likely. The estimated value of volunteer labor is 4.1 times (\$1,300 annually) greater.
- Employment in the nonprofit sector is twice as likely. The estimated value of the implicit wage contribution to nonprofits is 8.7 times (\$1,500 annually) greater.
- Annual cash donations to charities are \$900 (3.4 times) higher.
- Total philanthropic contributions (i.e., the value of volunteer labor plus the value of the implicit contribution to nonprofits plus cash donations) are \$3,600 (4.7 times) higher.
- Voting and political involvement are significantly higher.
- Participation in school, community, service, civic and religious organizations is substantially (1.9 times) higher. Leadership in these organizations is particularly (3.2 times) greater.
- Community involvement is significantly greater. For example, attendance at community meetings is 2.6 times greater.
- Neighborhood interactions and trust are significantly higher.

**SOURCE:** Trostel, P. (2015, October 14). It's not just the money: The benefits of college education to individuals and to society. *Lumina Issue Papers*. Indianapolis, IN: Lumina Foundation. Retrieved from <https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/its-not-just-the-money.pdf>

time and with large samples, college attendance is associated with these outcomes, especially when compared to individuals with a high school diploma.

This similar methodology was also used to calculate the collective benefits of college to society. The same types of comparisons are made between college graduates (without further graduate school education) and high school graduates with regard to the statements in Table 1.3 (Torstel, 2015, pp. 2–3).

The broad benefits to society are truly impressive, which makes the stakes even higher for the individual college student. Let's turn our attention to the individual student, examining in more detail those desired skills and competencies necessary for success in the workforce.

## Desired Skills and Competencies

### 1.3 Identify the basic skills and competencies most useful in the labor force

College graduates need to be ready for a variety of work situations and experiences. Chen (2004) reported that the average college graduate will have eight different jobs that will require work in three different professions or occupations. What types of skills and abilities will lead to success during a lifetime of work and career change? First, we should be clear on how we depict skills, and what is the difference between skills and competencies? Are competencies and badges (mini-certifications awarded based on pre-established assessment criteria; not the same as a course, typically less than what you would consider as a “minor”) the same? In very recent history, the higher education landscape has become more interesting and more confusing with the options available to students.

There are numerous ways to depict skills and their organizational frameworks, but one that we find particularly useful is from Burrus et al. (2013) and their work regarding the Occupational Information Network (O\*NET). Their organizational scheme is presented in Table 1.4.

**Table 1.4** An Organizational Framework for 21st-Century Skills

Category	Skill
Analytic skills	Critical thinking Problem solving Decision making Research and inquiry
Interpersonal skills	Communication Collaboration Leadership and responsibility
Ability to execute	Initiative and self-direction Productivity
Information processing	Information literacy Media/information and communication technology Digital citizenship information and communication technology operations and concepts
Capacity for change	Creativity/innovation Adaptive learning/learning to learn Flexibility
Living in the world	Citizenship/civic literacy Life and career Personal and social responsibility
Core subjects/21st-century themes	Mastery of core academic subjects Global awareness Financial, economic, business, and entrepreneurial literacy Health literacy Environmental literacy

**SOURCE:** Burrus, J., Jackson, T., Xi, N., & Steinberg, J. (2013, November). *Identifying the most important 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce competencies: An analysis of the Occupational Information Network (O\*NET)*. Research Report ETS R-13-21. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service. Retrieved from <https://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/RR-13-21.pdf>

In a survey of Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and other business leaders, the Committee for Economic Development of the Conference Board (2015) reported on essential competencies necessary for being hired, those competencies in shortest supply, and the combination—that is, competencies that are both essential and in short supply. We'll have much more to say about skills throughout this book, but to preview, the top five most essential competencies reported by individuals in this survey sample were (1) problem solving, (2) ability to work with others of diverse backgrounds, (3) critical thinking, (4) teamwork/collaboration, and (5) oral communication. The top five competencies reported as the 'hardest to hire' (starting with the hardest) were (1) quantitative ability/numeracy; (2) creativity/innovation; (3) Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) skills; (4) critical thinking; and (5) written communication. When asked about the combination of factors, CEOs and business leaders reported that critical thinking and problem-solving skills were both essential and the hardest to hire.

Of course, psychology majors can and do achieve many of these skills throughout their undergraduate careers, whether they intend to enter the workforce directly or pursue additional education in some postgraduate capacity. However, more options are becoming available to students at some colleges and universities in the form of credentialing, certificates, and badges (Horn, 2015). In addition to the major and the minor that appears on the institutional transcript, some institutions are implementing programs—sometimes called competency-based education or competency-based learning—where micro-credentials or badges can be earned “along the way” of earning the undergraduate degree. These badges can be independent of coursework or in parallel with coursework, depending on the design of the competency-based program. When done well, these badges and certificates are backed by valid assessment strategies that provide support to the claim that the badge holder has achieved a particular skill level in a particular area, such as information literacy, oral communication, global awareness, and so forth. Colleges and universities that meaningfully engage in badging

and credentialing programs can provide their students an added advantage for their launch into the workplace. These advantages can be useful even for students who may not even graduate from their institution.

## The Civic, Liberal Arts Value of a College Education

### 1.4 Determine the personal and social benefits of a liberal arts education

Your college education is not all about the accumulation of skills and abilities to get you a job. There are larger goals of an undergraduate education. All colleges and universities attempt to produce better-educated citizens who are capable of using higher order critical thinking skills.

One of the major characteristics of a liberal or liberal arts education is that it is not focused on a specific career, but aims instead to provide an environment both within the curriculum and outside it that helps students to learn how to think, how to be creative, how to be flexible, how to get on with others—and how to go on learning for the rest of their lives. (Chen, 2004, p. 2)

Long ago, Newman (1852) communicated this idea quite well (see Table 1.5).

## The Financial Value of a College Education

### 1.5 Relate college education to financial status

We have already explored many of the reasons for coming to college, whether it is to obtain a good job, to improve yourself, to become a better citizen, to gain critical thinking skills, or to master the covert curriculum. These are all appropriate motivations, but so is the motivation to improve your financial standing. Money is not everything in life, but it sure helps. We would be remiss if we did not address this important issue.

In later chapters of this book, we discuss the specifics of what you can earn with the various degrees in psychology, including specialty areas. For now, let's focus on the general benefit of staying in college. How much more money can you expect to make with a college degree compared to a high school diploma? Is there much financial advantage to

**Table 1.5** The Aim of a University Education

If then a practical end must be assigned to a University course, I say it is that of training good members of society. Its art is the art of social life, and its end is fitness for the world. It neither confines its views to particular professions on one hand, nor creates heroes or inspires genius on the other. Works indeed of genius fall under no art; heroic minds come under no rule; a University is not a birthplace of poets or of immortal authors, of founders of schools, leaders of colonies, or conquerors of nations. It does not promise a generation of Aristotles or Newtons, of Napoleons or Washingtons, of Raphaels or Shakespeares, though such miracles it has before now contained within its precincts. Nor is it content on the other hand with forming the critic or the experimentalist, the economist or the engineer, although such too it includes within its scope. But a university training is the great ordinary means to a great but ordinary end; it aims at raising the intellectual tone of society, at cultivating the public mind, at purifying the national taste, at supplying true principles to popular enthusiasm and fixed aims to popular aspiration, at giving enlargement and sobriety to the ideas of the age, at facilitating the exercise of political power, and refining the intercourse of private life. It is the education which gives a [person] a clear, conscious view of their own opinions and judgments, a truth in developing them, an eloquence in expressing them, and a force in urging them.

**SOURCE:** Newman (1852).



**Table 1.6** Estimates of Average Annual Earnings and Median Lifetime Earnings for Full-Time, Year-Round Workers by Educational Attainment

Educational Attainment	Average Annual Earnings <sup>1</sup>	Median Lifetime Earnings <sup>2</sup>
Doctoral degree	\$ 99,697	\$3,525,000
Professional degree <sup>3</sup>	\$125,019	\$4,159,000
Master's degree	\$ 70,856	\$2,834,000
Bachelor's degree	\$ 58,613	\$2,422,000
Associate's degree	\$ 39,506	\$1,813,000
Some college	\$ 32,555	\$1,632,000
High school graduate or GED	\$ 31,283	\$1,371,000
Less than 9th grade	\$ 21,023	\$ 936,000

<sup>1</sup>U.S. Census Bureau.<sup>2</sup>Julian (2012).<sup>3</sup>Professional degrees include M.D. (physician), J.D. (lawyer), D.D.S. (dentist), and D.V.M. (veterinarian).

getting a master's degree compared to a bachelor's degree? These types of questions are answered in Table 1.6. We should note that although the findings presented in this table generally are correct, your results may vary—that is, reality is more complicated than the rows and columns of the table. Carnevale et al. (2011), in examining previous iterations of median lifetime earnings data, offered the following four cogent observations:

**Rule 1:** Degree level matters, and on average, people with more education make more money than those with less education.

**Rule 2:** Occupations can trump degree levels, meaning that people with less education can sometimes outlearn people with more education, typically because of occupational differences.

**Rule 3:** Although occupation can sometimes trump education, degree level achieved still matters most within individual occupations (e.g., an accountant with more education will make more than an accountant with less education).

**Rule 4:** Race, ethnicity, and gender are wild cards that can trump everything else when trying to develop general statements about determining career-based earnings.

Again, it is important to reiterate that financial reasons alone should not dictate your life decisions—do you really want to be quite miserable while making a good income? However, these data are useful as one component of your decision-making process. Also, if you are in the middle of your sophomore year in college and having a hard time staying motivated, the information in Table 1.6 might be helpful. For instance, you might think about getting your associate's degree (an intermediate degree that can typically be earned in two years) if you are too burned out to finish the bachelor's degree. And remember, there are over 4,600 colleges and universities in the United States—if you drop out and then decide to drop back in, there will be opportunities to do so.

We would encourage you, with our strongest possible advice, to finish what you start. There are financial benefits to completing your education, but as you read earlier, there are health-related benefits, child-rearing benefits, societal benefits, etc. You might be surprised at the percentages of college students who actually end up earning their bachelor's degree. After four years, 38.9% complete a bachelor's degree; after five years, 56.4%; and after six years, 61.2% (DeAngelo et al., 2011). To the extent possible in your life, finish what you start!

## Success Stories

### Keri Kytola Wilson College

After completing many years of higher education, I have just started my career as an Assistant Professor of Psychology at a small liberal arts school. Although my educational journey has not been easy, it has been well worth it because I have met a lot of intelligent, inspiring people and learned many important lessons along the way. One lesson that I learned early on, but only recently embraced is that you should never underestimate yourself or give up simply because you believe you cannot achieve a goal. Like many students about to graduate from high school, that goal for me was going to college. However, as a female from a low income background with limited family support, I struggled with low self-esteem and thus had little confidence in my ability to succeed in college due to the financial, academic, and social demands. The fact that I was going to be a first-generation college student made me even more uncertain about being able to meet those demands. Shortly after I decided to go to college (i.e., I applied to prestigious institutions all over the country that I had never heard of), it became clear that achieving my goal would be much more daunting than I imagined when I repeatedly got rejected by the schools I had hoped to attend. Once everything was said and done (i.e., I was turned down by every school I applied to due to my less-than-satisfactory performance in high school) and the dust settled (i.e., I stopped panicking about my future), I re-evaluated my expectations and my goal (i.e., I got a close friend to mentor me). During this re-evaluation process, I learned that I could attend a local community college for one year and then transfer to a neighboring four-year university to finish my Bachelor's degree. Ten years to the day later, choosing to attend community college early on in my academic career turned out to be invaluable for several reasons. First, I got to experience college-level courses on a much smaller scale in terms of class size. This aspect afforded me the opportunity to develop personal relationships with my professors and classmates prior to attending a larger university where it is often more difficult to set oneself apart. Additionally, this small but diverse population exposed me to students from many different backgrounds, age groups, and cultures. As a result, I got to know many non-traditional students who were also first-generation college students. Building these relationships helped me feel more connected to and supported by fellow students who faced similar struggles. Through these experiences, I gained the much needed confidence and momentum I needed to transfer to a four-year university. With the ongoing help of many close friends and mentors, I finally achieved my goal of becoming the first person in my family to graduate from college three years after transferring. That accomplishment was monumental and only served to further boost my confidence! Unbeknownst to my 18-year old self, my new and improved goal was to go to graduate school to earn a doctorate. Just like my undergraduate experience, the graduate application process was grueling and the five-year long training was difficult for me. But, despite the obstacles, completing my Ph.D. was tremendously rewarding

because I not only got to delve more deeply into the vast field of psychology, but I also discovered my passion for teaching others about psychology. As a college professor and mentor, it is my hope that I can serve as a source of support for other underrepresented students throughout their academic endeavors so they, too, can achieve their goals.

## Oh, You Don't Have to go to College . . .

### 1.6 Compare job and educational alternatives to college

Better pay typically comes with more education. However, to be fair, if pay is your primary consideration, we should point out that you can have a top-paying job without a bachelor's degree at all. From recent research, Lozon (2018) reported on research from CareerBuilder regarding the top-paying jobs without the need for a college degree. See Table 1.7 for the job titles, hourly wages, and approximate annual salaries.

Not only are these salaries attractive but also many of these jobs are in high demand now. As of this writing, there were 700,000 electrician jobs available, 400,000 plumber, pipefitter, or steamfitter jobs available, and 700,000 computer user support specialist jobs available (Lozon, 2018).

It is important to note that, for most, if not all of the jobs listed in Table 1.7, additional education and training are necessary, and in many cases, certification and/or some type of licensing. So although you may not need "college" to be successful, you will likely need additional training and education for the rest of your life to be successful in whatever pursuit you choose.

We believe it is important to point out one additional opportunity that may be viable for many individuals: military service. There are so many options available, which involve training that can lead to excellent civilian jobs, training that can lead to lifelong careers in the military, enlistment programs that can pay for college, and more. An education and training for your future can come in many forms, and the military route may be an excellent choice for some. If interested, you can start to explore this path at <https://www.todaysmilitary.com>.

**Table 1.7** Highest-Paying Jobs Not Requiring a College Degree

Job Title	Hourly Wage	Approximate Annual Salary
Electrician	\$26.33	\$52,660
Plumbers, pipefitters, steamfitters	\$25.76	\$51,520
Computer user support specialists	\$25.50	\$51,000
Industrial machine mechanics	\$24.87	\$49,740
Surgical technologists	\$22.68	\$45,360
Heating, air-conditioning, and refrigeration mechanics and installers	\$22.39	\$44,780
Chefs and head cooks	\$21.54	\$43,080
Fitness trainers and aerobics instructors	\$20.23	\$40,460
Medical records and health information technicians	\$19.96	\$39,920
Self-enrichment education teachers	\$19.91	\$39,820

**NOTE:** Approximate annual salary was based on an estimated 2000-hour work year multiplied by the hourly wage.

**SOURCE:** Lozon, V. (2018, June 30). Didn't graduate college? Here are the highest-paying jobs. *clickondetroit.com*. Retrieved from <https://www.clickondetroit.com/money/jobs/didnt-graduate-college-here-are-the-highest-paying-jobs-without-needing-a-college-degree>

As we conclude this chapter, we hope you can see that we want to be fair with the data. We want to present all possible options, and evidence-based whenever possible. There are plenty of good answers to the question “why college,” but college is not the answer for all. You have to decide if you are going to make the most of the opportunities and experiences. With regard to majoring in psychology, the remainder of this book is devoted to providing advice and support on just how to make the most of your undergraduate career.

## Exercise 1.1 Potential Challenges to Staying in College

We assume that you are reading this book because you are already in college. However, you should know that a great many students start college but never finish. Even though this first chapter (and the rest of this book) will make persuasive arguments for continuing your college education, some students do drop out. Researchers studying college student adjustment (e.g., Klein & Pierce, 2009) use different methods and scales to attempt to measure adjustment to college. Once such scale, the College Adjustment Scales (Anton & Reed, 1991), has different factors or subscales

by which scores are recorded. In the table below are the subscale titles—just for your own self-reflection, think a bit about how much each of these categories might be a threat for you to stay in college or not. Remember that you are not actually completing the College Adjustment Scales, but this is just an exercise to help you proactively think about possible threats in your own college environment. Being familiar with the items on this list may alert you to positive situations to pursue and negative situations to avoid.

The Level of Potential Threat for Dropping Out of School					
Area	Not at all	Slightly	Somewhat	Moderately	Absolutely could be
Academic problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Anxiety	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interpersonal problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Depression	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Career problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Suicidal ideation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Substance abuse	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Self-esteem problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Knowing about these factors may help you to anticipate negative situations and increase your chances for success during your undergraduate education. Be sure to

take advantage of the counseling services available on your campus.

## Exercise 1.2 The College Success Checklist

In 2014, Purdue University and the Gallup Organization began a collaboration supported in part by the Lumina Foundation to study more than 30,000 college graduates (i.e., alumni) across the United States (Gallup, Inc. 2014). Each year, they collect survey data and issue reports based on the analyzed data.

One of the reports from the data analysis is from Busteed (2017) about the methods to make college a

success. What is intriguing about these recommendations is that they come from college graduates, who can reflect on their own workforce experiences and what was and was not relevant to their college experience. Scan the checklist below for advice from tens of thousands of alumni on the ways to make college a success.

✓	Advice for Making the Most of College
	Get a postsecondary credential or degree. But don't feel like you need to do this until you have a clear or somewhat clear idea of your goals. Think about career and life goals first, then think about majors and fields of study.
	Do not pursue a bachelor's degree by default. Associate degree holders are more likely to strongly agree that they have their ideal job than bachelor's degree holders, and you can always stack more degrees later if you need them.
	Don't take on more than \$25,000 in total student loan debt.
	Question the value of attending prestigious, highly selective, and high-priced colleges and universities. "College is much more about what you make of it—how you take advantage of your education—than the type of institution you attend" (Busteed, 2017, para 5).
	As much as you can, pick professors, not courses. Seek out professors who have the reputation for being the amazing teachers and mentors.
	Speaking of mentors, invest in a mentor. Spend time finding a mentor who will invest in you, and invest yourself in that professional relationship.
	When possible, have a job or internship that gives you the opportunity to apply what you are learning in the classroom—make the classroom to real-work connections.
	Purposely take one or more courses that are long-term projects, requiring a semester/quarter or more to complete.
	Do not pad your resume with a bunch of extracurricular activities where you did not do much; rather, take a deep dive and become involved in one or two (leadership opportunities are even better).

**SOURCES:** Gallup, Inc. (2014). *Great jobs, great lives: The 2014 Gallup-Purdue Index Report: A study of more than 30,000 college graduates across the U.S.* Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/gallup-purdue-index-report-2014.pdf>.; Busteed, B. (2017, June 6). 5 ways to make college a success. Gallup, Inc. Retrieved from <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/211796/ways-college-success.aspx>

Of course, there is no “right” or “wrong” score from this checklist, but it is meant to be thought-provoking. We recommend that you revisit this checklist at least once a

year, or better yet, and the beginning and end of every semester/quarter/term, just to check to make sure you are on track with your overall, ultimate goals.

# Chapter 2

## Why Psychology?



### Learning Objectives

- 2.1** Describe the diversity of psychology degrees
- 2.2** Summarize current trends in psychology majors
- 2.3** Evaluate your psychology-related skills
- 2.4** Identify traits common to effective mentoring and advising
- 2.5** Explain the benefits of majoring in psychology

At the undergraduate level, many students select psychology as a major because of their interest in becoming a psychologist. If you study this book carefully, talk to students majoring in psychology, and listen to your psychology professors, you will quickly understand that you will not be qualified to be a psychologist at the conclusion of your undergraduate training. It is best to think of your undergraduate education in psychology as learning about psychology, not learning “to do” psychology. McGovern et al. (1991, p. 600) made this point clear when they stated that “a liberal arts education in general, and the study of psychology in particular, is a preparation for lifelong learning, thinking, and action; it emphasizes specialized and general knowledge and skills.” A quality undergraduate education in psychology should prepare you to be a citizen and a critical thinker—the professional functioning of a psychologist comes after specialized work and training at the graduate level.

Even though the bachelor’s degree in psychology is not a professional degree, it is still a good choice to produce a well-rounded, well-educated citizen and person. You may have heard of the notion of reading literacy or information literacy? McGovern et al. (2010) formulated and articulated the notion of psychological literacy, and the characteristics of a psychologically literate person include:

- having a well-defined vocabulary and basic knowledge of the critical subject matter in psychology;
- valuing the intellectual challenges required to use scientific thinking and the disciplined analysis of information to evaluate alternative courses of action;
- taking a creative and amiable skeptic approach to problem solving;
- applying psychological principles to personal, social, and organizational issues at work, relationships, and the broader community;
- acting ethically;
- being competent in using and evaluating information and technology;
- communicating effectively in different modes and with many different audiences;
- recognizing, understanding, and fostering respect for diversity; and
- being insightful and reflective about one’s own and others’ behavior and mental processes (p. 11).

Completing a rigorous program of undergraduate coursework while majoring in psychology should put graduates well on their way to achieving psychological literacy.

And before someone tries to tell you that you cannot make any money with a bachelor's degree in psychology, let's just pre-empt that notion right now. There are a few different perspectives for looking at salaries, income, and employment in general. The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) published a report in 2015 that reported on the first destinations of the graduations of the Class of 2014. For those majoring in psychology, here is what they reported:

- Percentage standard employment full time: 36.7%
- Percentage continuing education: 25.9%
- Percentage without an income: 22.3%
- Mean starting salary: \$33,210

This is the reality based on these data. It is difficult to know for those reporting no income if they were actually seeking an income or not. Obviously, these are topics that matter to many, and it should not be surprising that these are topics studied by many. Carnevale and Cheah (2015) in their own national study through Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce studied over a three-year span both unemployment rates and median earning by major. They also made comparisons of recent college graduates versus experienced college graduates and young graduate degree holders and experienced graduate degree holders. These data are presented in Table 2.1.

## Areas of Specialization Within Psychology

### 2.1 Describe the diversity of psychology degrees

The skills and abilities that a student can attain with a psychology major are impressive. These skills and abilities help explain, in part, the growing popularity of this major. Students seem to be initially attracted to psychology by courses in the areas of abnormal psychology, personality developmental psychology, and social psychology. Students are also attracted to the major because of the applicability of the subject matter—human behavior. For instance, although some students enter college declaring psychology as their major, often psychology departments see increases in the number of majors following completion of the introductory / general psychology course. Introductory psychology can be a challenging course, and many departments have very talented instructors teaching the course. Talented instructors can make interesting subject matter come alive—perhaps another reason for the popularity of psychology.

**Table 2.1** Psychology Graduates Unemployment and Median Earnings, Early and With Experience

	Year	Recent College Graduate	Experienced College Graduate	Young Graduate Degree Recipient	Experienced Graduate Degree Recipient
Unemployment	2009–2010	7.6%	6.0%	3.9%	3.3%
	2010–2011	9.2%	6.9%	3.9%	3.5%
	2011–2012	9.3%	6.3%	3.9%	3.3%
Median Earnings	2009–2010	\$32,000	\$52,000	\$53,000	\$71,000
	2010–2011	\$32,000	\$54,000	\$52,000	\$69,000
	2011–2012	\$31,000	\$53,000	\$50,000	\$68,000

**SOURCE:** Carnevale, A. P., & Cheah, B. (2015). From hard times to better times: College majors, unemployment, and earnings. Center on Education and the Workforce. Washington, DC: Georgetown University. Retrieved from <https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/HardTimes2015-Report.pdf>



## Success Stories

### Amanda West

I grew up on a municipal airport in a middle class family. My father was the caretaker of the airport and my mother operated a bakery out of the home. I remember having a happy childhood, using the airplane hangars as my personal roller skating rink, and learning how to drive on the runways.

I was a bright child who did well in school, and had a publication by the time I was 15. Somewhere around that time my brother was charged with murder and my parents started having problems. The stress and the money were too much to bear and they divorced not long after the charge, and I began to get bullied by the family of the victim. It was then that I started spiraling out of control.

I quit school halfway through my senior year and by the time I was 18 I had my first child. Shortly after that, I was married and by the time I was 21, I had my second child. I was happy as a mother of two wonderful children, but my husband began doing opiates and it wasn't long after that I was doing them too. By the time I was 26, I had a full-blown habit and struggled to get clean.

I was in and out of rehab for years. During that process, I thought that becoming a counselor may be the right career path for me, and my love of psychology began to bloom. I separated from my husband at 32 because I knew that it was the only way to get clean, and tried to make a new life for my children and myself.

I slept on my mother's floor for about 9 months, wearing my children's clothes because I left everything behind. I was 33 when I received the call that would change my life. My husband had been found dead after an overdose.

Suddenly, I was alone. With no skills to speak of other than bartending, I decided that I would get my GED and go to college. I was a non-traditional first-generation student and I was terrified, but as it turned out, I was an excellent student. I graduated from community college in 2013, and went on to double major in psychology and gerontology at the Missouri State University while working two jobs and caring for my two teenagers. I finally felt like I was worth something.

In my final semester as I was preparing to take the GRE and apply for doctorate programs, my father was diagnosed with dementia and I became his legal guardian. It was a stressful time and I had to put off my dreams of a Ph.D., but my dad was worth it. I continued to work in the restaurant business while I finished school, and that is where I was offered a job by the CEO of a local center for independent living. I landed the job, got published in a scholarly journal, and then graduated cum laude all within a couple of months, and I finally realized my full potential.

Today I am the Assistive Technology Coordinator at the third largest center for independent living in the state, an Americans with Disabilities Act Coordinator, and a member of the board of directors for another nonprofit organization. I apply the knowledge that I gained in the psychology program on a daily basis, whether I am working with someone with aphasia, dementia, PTSD, or depression and anxiety due to aging or acquiring a new disability. My hard work has paid off, and now I have a profession of helping others.

In the introductory course, students are introduced to the various areas and specializations in psychology; the options are staggering. As a psychology major, you will receive a good grounding in the basics of psychology, taking courses that emphasize the development of skills and abilities (e.g., research methods and statistics) while also accumulating a knowledge base (e.g., developmental psychology, social psychology, and history and systems). Even if you recently completed an introductory course, it is hard to remember all the options. To our knowledge, there is no “official” list of the major areas of psychology; we compiled our list from a number of sources. Within most of these areas, there are opportunities to specialize even further—more on this later in this chapter. Technically speaking, though, the American Psychological Association (APA) recognizes only four “specialties”—clinical, counseling, school, and industrial/organizational psychology (APA, 2007). All the remaining areas are considered subfields or areas of concentration. For the sake of clarity, however, we will call the specializations with psychology “areas.” Typically, you will not specialize in a particular area at the undergraduate level, although there are a handful of institutions in the United States where a student can earn a specialized undergraduate degree in psychology. Your area of specialization becomes much more important if you elect to attend graduate school. In fact, if you decide to pursue a graduate degree in psychology, not only will you probably specialize in one of the areas presented but also your degree may also come from a program that specializes even further.

For a sense of those different levels of specialization, Table 2.2 presents a listing of master’s degrees and/or doctoral degrees that can be earned in psychology programs in the United States—these broad categories were gleaned from the index of the helpful book to those with an interest in graduate school titled *Graduate Study in Psychology* (American Psychological Association [APA], 2018). Note that the number in parentheses following each area indicates the number of schools offering that specialty area as of July 2018.

At this point, it is not necessary to know exactly which area of psychology you want to study—what is important is that you begin to understand the vast opportunities and diversity of specializations that psychology has to offer. With all of the choices available, you may ask, “Where do I begin selecting courses as a psychology major, and what can I do with a bachelor’s degree?” Those questions sound like ones that you might ask of your academic advisor or your mentor—more on these important roles later in this chapter.

**Table 2.2** APA Areas of Specialization for Master’s and Doctoral Degree Psychology Programs

Applied Behavior Analysis (60)	Human Development and Family Studies (12)
Behavioral Psychology (58)	Human Factors (25)
Biological Psychology (30)	Humanistic Psychology (4)
Child and Adolescent Psychology (67)	Industrial/Organizational Psychology (150)
Clinical Psychology (367)	Marriage and Family Therapy (33)
Cognitive Psychology (152)	Mental Health Counseling (71)
Community Counseling (9)	Multicultural Psychology (17)
Community Psychology (30)	Neuropsychology (27)
Comparative Psychology (1)	Neuroscience (114)
Consulting Psychology (16)	Other (10)
Counseling Psychology (133)	Personality Psychology (30)
Developmental Psychology (143)	Physiological Psychology (11)
Educational Psychology (75)	Primary Care Psychology (1)
Environmental Psychology (2)	Psychoanalytic Psychology (2)
Experimental Psychology (Applied) (50)	Psycholinguistics (5)
Experimental Psychology (General) (133)	Psychopharmacology (3)
Family Psychology (9)	Quantitative Psychology (63)
Forensic Psychology (37)	Rehabilitation Psychology (6)
Gender Psychology (3)	School Counseling (45)
General Psychology (Theory, History, and Philosophy) (41)	School Psychology (187)
Geropsychology (8)	Social Psychology (130)
Health Psychology (66)	Sport Psychology (3)

**SOURCE:** American Psychological Association. (2018). *Graduate study in psychology 2018*. [Online]. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://gradstudy.apa.org/index.cfm?action=browseprogram>

# Who Majors in Psychology?

## 2.2 Summarize current trends in psychology majors

Psychology continues to be an extremely popular choice, both for students enrolled in its courses and psychology majors. Currently, psychology is a very popular major. At the time of this writing with the latest data available (2015–2016) from the National Center for Education Statistics (2017a), the top four degree-granting majors in the United States are business (371,694 graduates), health professions and related programs (228,896 graduates), social sciences and history (161,230 graduates), and psychology (117,440 graduates). To be fair, those three “majors” ahead of psychology are an amalgamation of multiple majors under one cluster. If majors were “counted” on an individual basis, it is likely that psychology is the most popular major in the nation (if the metric were number of bachelor’s degrees earned).

The number of students choosing to major in psychology has grown over time and is likely to continue growing. There have been over 70,000 bachelor’s degrees in psychology awarded every year since 1994–1995 (Snyder & Dillow, 2011). To graphically see the historical trend in the awarding of bachelor’s degrees in psychology, see Figure 2.1. How do the other graduation statistics stack up? In 2015–2016, 10,603 students received an associate’s degree in psychology (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017b), 27,645 students received master’s degrees in psychology, and 6,532 students received doctorates in psychology (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017c).

One of the recurring themes to think about as you read this book is this: What will you do, as an undergraduate, to make yourself competitive with 117,000+ graduates in psychology each year? It doesn’t matter if you go the workforce psychology route or the graduate school route—the competition will be fierce for premium opportunities. Assuming the continued popularity of psychology as witnessed in Figure 2.1 over the past 65 years, there will only be more competition for the best opportunities as time goes on. Multiple sections of this book are dedicated to alerting you to the opportunities available now and preparing you to maximize those opportunities now. We also focus on skills and abilities that you can develop while you are still an undergraduate.

**Figure 2.1** U.S. Psychology Bachelor’s Degrees by Gender, 1950–2016

**SOURCE:** National Center for Education Statistics. (2017c). Degrees in psychology conferred by postsecondary institutions, by level of degree and sex of student: Selected years, 1949–1950 through 2015–2016 [Table 325.80]. *Digest of Education Statistics*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17\\_325.80.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_325.80.asp)

