

# Planning a Career in Psychology

A Canadian Perspective for  
University Bound  
and  
Beginning University Students



CANADIAN PSYCHOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION



CANADIAN ASSOCIATION  
OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

*Planning a Career in Psychology*  
*A Canadian Perspective for University Bound and Beginning University Students*  
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# **Planning a Career in Psychology:**

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### **University Bound and Beginning University Students**

**Marvin L. Simner**

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## INTRODUCTION

If you are a high school student contemplating university, or a beginning university student with a desire to major in psychology, you are not alone. Psychology is one of the most popular undergraduate majors among Canadian university students. Of the numerous possible undergraduate majors available across Canada, only two others (business/commerce; general liberal arts and sciences) have higher undergraduate enrolment (Canadian Association of University Teachers (2008-2009)). The same holds true in the United States. In a single year, nearly 67,000 bachelor's degrees were awarded in Psychology (Murray, 1996). The only other undergraduate major that was more popular in the United States was Business Administration and Management.

The purpose of this booklet is to help you decide whether psychology is the best major for you. The booklet has five sections to guide you. The first section contains an overview of the discipline. Here you will find brief descriptions of the main subfields within psychology. Also included is information on a number of closely related disciplines, in case you are undecided about whether to major in psychology. Finally, should you elect not to attend university, there is information on how to enter the helping professions via the community college system.

The second section deals with several ways to determine whether psychology is indeed an appropriate career choice. Here we discuss the advantages of volunteering, speaking with people already working in the field, or contacting a professionally trained career counsellor. The third section focuses on registration or licensing, the postgraduate training needed to acquire a master's or doctoral degree to become a professional psychologist, and the procedures you should follow to complete this training.

In the fourth section, entitled "Occupational Outlook," there are suggestions for those who might choose, after several years of university, not to become a psychologist and instead to enter the job market once they complete a bachelor's degree. Despite what may be your initial intention prior to entering university, surveys show that most psychology undergraduate majors seek employment shortly after graduating (Borden & Rajecki, 2000; Dillinger & Landrum, 2002). In fact, fewer than 10% actually undertake postgraduate training with the aim of becoming a professional psychologist (Rajecki & Anderson, 2004). Therefore, it may be helpful to know some of the promising career opportunities that you may wish to explore should you enter the work force immediately after finishing your undergraduate degree. If you do decide to pursue advanced training in psychology, however, the section also contains information on the occupational outlook once you complete your postgraduate education.

The fifth section of the booklet offers guidelines on how to succeed in university. While today most students enter university with very high grades, many also experience a drop in their grade point average by the end of first year. If this happens to you, there is no need to panic. Grades often improve in second year and most postgraduate schools rely less on undergraduate performance during the first year than in later years when making admissions decisions. However, to avoid serious academic difficulties that could lead to probation or even dismissal, it is helpful to know at the onset of your university career, the characteristics that typify the successful student. If you already possess these characteristics, or if you take the necessary steps to acquire them, you will find that the university experience can be an extremely rewarding undertaking.

## SUBFIELDS OF PSYCHOLOGY

According to the American Psychological Association, which is the largest psychological organization in the world, there are 13 main subfields within psychology. What follows is a brief description of each. Graduate training in most of these subfields is available in Canada.

### **Clinical/Counselling Psychology**

Students who wish to become either a clinical or counselling psychologist often do so because they want to help people who are experiencing difficulties in their daily lives. Although there are commonalities between the two fields, there are also important differences. In terms of commonalities, clinical as well as counselling psychologists are likely to work with children or adults to alleviate intellectual, emotional, social and behavioural problems. Both are also likely to provide evidence-based assessment and treatment services, and may conduct research and train students. They are often employed in similar settings, such as universities, hospitals, outpatient clinics, community mental health centres, or private practice settings. Moreover, as helping professionals, both require good interpersonal communication skills, listening skills, and interviewing skills.

In terms of differences, clinical psychologists (on average) are more likely to work with severely impaired people such as those suffering from schizophrenia, dementia, or brain damage. Counselling psychologists, on the other hand, are more likely to work with people having less severe problems that do not require periods of hospitalization (Davis, 1997, p. 95) and who may be seeking more in the way of personal growth, career changes or other changes in their daily lives (though this is somewhat of a generalization, and there are many exceptions). They are also more likely to work in educational settings such as high schools and universities. The distinction between the two is perhaps most apparent at the graduate level in that the majority of counselling programs are housed in faculties of education whereas clinical programs are typically located in departments of psychology.

### **Developmental Psychology**

Developmental psychology is a branch of academic psychology that focuses on when, how, and why people change with age. Developmental psychologists often work in university settings and study issues that range from the emergence of skilled motor behaviours such as walking, to the role that parents might play in the development of language, social behaviours and children's academic performance. They may also assume research positions in hospital settings or in industry. Some developmental psychologists specialize in the study of prenatal behaviour, others focus on the period of infancy, childhood, or adolescence, and still others take a life span approach and deal with behaviour changes among the elderly.

### **Educational/School Psychology**

Educational and school psychology are also closely related fields. The major distinction is that people who work as educational psychologists are typically employed as faculty in university settings and conduct basic or applied research on topics related to the teaching and learning of curriculum based materials. School psychologists, on the other hand, typically work in schools, and deal directly with staff, pupils and parents on a host of school related issues. For example, they might be called upon to diagnose and make recommendations concerning learning difficulties, counsel staff and students following a school related crisis, and provide in-service training on techniques for preventing disruptive behaviours such as bullying.

### **Engineering Psychology**

As the name implies, engineering psychology is the interface between industrial engineering and psychology. Most engineering psychologists are employed in industry and are likely to deal with problems such as how to prevent worker fatigue on an assembly line, how to improve safety in a work setting, or how to design an environment that would lead to both greater productivity and employee satisfaction. Some also work for government and may be involved in developing procedures for preventing terrorism through the design of airport security systems, for example.

### **Forensic Psychology**

Forensic psychology represents the interface between clinical psychology and the law. When called upon in court forensic psychologists can make recommendations regarding the mental competence of a defendant to stand trial, or in custody cases, comment on the most suitable arrangements for young children. Some work in correctional facilities where they might develop rehabilitation programs, whereas others work as consultants to trial lawyers who prepare arguments for jury presentation. Practising forensic psychologists also work in psychiatric hospitals with people who have been found not guilty of crimes because of mental illness. Still others may conduct research in university settings on such issues as the legitimacy of eyewitness testimony or on factors that may influence the recall of traumatic events.

### **General Experimental Psychology**

Experimental psychologists are principally interested in theoretical matters that pertain to human as well as animal behaviour in areas such as problem solving, thinking, learning, and perception. Topics they might investigate include such matters as how birds navigate, how humans acquire keyboarding skills, how memory influences language usage, and how animals communicate with each other as well as with humans. Experimental psychologists typically work as faculty members in university settings, but may also work in other settings, such as hospitals, industry, or government.

### **Health Psychology**

Health psychologists focus on the interplay between the biological, psychological, and social factors that influence physical health and well-being. As practitioners, they may help clients who suffer from severe pain, have substance abuse problems, phobias, etc. or who are dealing with the stress of a serious illness. Those who work in universities, hospitals or medical schools could be called upon to educate staff and students about the psychological causes of symptoms that might otherwise be attributed to underlying physiological or biochemical causes. Alternatively, they could engage in basic research leading to the development of programs to prevent teenage pregnancy, addiction to tobacco, drugs or alcohol.

### **Industrial/Organizational Psychology**

Those who work in this subfield are usually referred to as “I/O psychologists,” and are primarily concerned with ways to maximize both job satisfaction and employee productivity in the workplace. They frequently are hired by government agencies, businesses and industry to develop procedures used in personnel selection, to assist in such areas as strategic planning, or to help employees cope with organizational change.

### **Neuropsychology**

The two main branches here are academic neuropsychology and clinical neuropsychology, though many neuropsychologists may work in settings where the distinction is blurred, and they may be involved

in clinical practice, research, or training. Academic neuropsychologists typically work in universities or academic teaching hospitals, where they design studies to explore the relationships between brain and behaviour. When working with a clinic population, they might examine how diseases or injuries of the brain affect the way people perceive their world, influence emotion, or alter behaviour. Those interested in normal brain function might ask how certain parts of the brain influence a person's language or motivation. Clinical neuropsychologists, on the other hand, usually have a doctoral degree in clinical psychology and often work in applied settings such as hospitals or rehabilitation centres where, together with other health care professionals, they are likely to assess the impact and location of brain damage and help people cope with and recover from serious brain injuries. They also often work with pharmaceutical firms because of their knowledge of physiology and drugs, and they might also be called upon to make determinations in insurance cases that involve head injuries.

### **Quantitative Psychology**

Quantitative psychologists often work primarily in academic settings, but they may also work in industry or in applied settings such as hospitals. Although their interests are quite broad, they typically focus on developing methods for collecting and analysing data. For example, they may help in the development of personality, intelligence, or aptitude tests. They may also help other researchers in designing experiments and in the use of certain statistical techniques to interpret findings.

### **Rehabilitation Psychology**

Rehabilitation psychologists receive extensive training in acute care hospitals, nursing homes, and physical rehabilitation centres, to name a few, which prepares them to assist individuals suffering from stroke, epilepsy, spinal cord injury, cerebral palsy, chronic pain, and other chronic health problems. The assistance they provide can help such individuals to achieve optimal psychological, and personal functioning by addressing the obstacles they need to overcome. In addition to the institutions mentioned above, they may work in assisted living centres, consult to industry regarding safety standards, or assist the courts and insurance agencies regarding the legitimacy of injury claims.

### **Social Psychology**

Social psychologists deal primarily with how people interact with one another. They are interested, for example, in such matters as how impressions of others are formed, how prejudicial attitudes develop, and how group dynamics influence individual decision making. They are likely to work in academic settings as well as in applied settings such as advertising agencies where they might study consumer preferences. Or, they could be employed in businesses and government agencies where they might focus on the organizational structure of staff or management, for example.

### **Sports Psychology**

Sports psychologists engage in what is often referred to as performance enhancement training. Working with individual athletes, they can help reduce anxiety, fear of failure, or depression, all of which can stem from the pressure of intense competition. In addition, they frequently deal with motivational issues, and can provide training to help correct problems that might interfere with certain skilled behaviours, such as a golf swing. Working with coaches, sports psychologists also help to develop procedures to enhance team cohesion to improve overall team performance.



### **Related Fields**

There are several closely related fields that may also be worth considering, especially if you are debating whether to major in psychology. It should be pointed out, however, that because psychology is a government regulated profession, it would not be appropriate for the Canadian Psychological Association or the Canadian Association of School Psychologists, the sponsors of this booklet, to approve, disapprove, or endorse the practices of any other helping profession. Thus the following fields are provided for information purposes only. Although undergraduates who major in psychology often enter these fields, training in psychology is not necessarily the only way to gain admission. For information on the admission requirements, visit the web sites given below.

#### *Human Resources*

Although most psychology majors who seek a career in human resources are primarily interested in personnel selection or career counselling, the field itself encompasses activities that range from finance and accounting to compensation, workplace health and safety, and labour relations. While some companies require a university degree in psychology or social work, others may seek individuals with a certificate from a community college. For information on certification contact the Canadian Council of Human Resources Association ([www.cchra.ca](http://www.cchra.ca)). For examples of job postings go to [www.workopolis.com](http://www.workopolis.com) or [www.monster.ca](http://www.monster.ca).

#### *Marriage and Family Therapy*

Professionals who work in this field deal with a range of clinical problems that may include depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress, burnout, substance abuse, gambling, and marital difficulties, to name but a few. Although the focus is often on a given individual, marriage and family therapists provide help not only to that person but are also concerned with the overall well-being of the individual and his or her family. To become a therapist requires training beyond the bachelor's degree. For more detailed information on matters such as registration and training programs in Canada visit the web site for the Registry of Marriage and Family Therapists in Canada ([www.marriageandfamily.ca](http://www.marriageandfamily.ca)).

#### *Psychiatry*

Psychiatrists are physicians who specializes in the treatment of mental disorders. Although the patients they treat, for the most part, are similar to those who seek assistance from clinical psychologists, psychiatrists are licensed to prescribe medication and therefore are able to assist people who suffer from the more severe biologically-based disorders such as schizophrenia where pharmacological treatment is appropriate. A physician who wishes to become a psychiatrist enters psychiatric training, which, in Canada, is usually five years in length, following completion of the medical degree. During training, a psychiatrist may further specialize in, for example, child and adolescent psychiatry, geriatric psychiatry, or forensic psychiatry. Additional information can be obtained from the Canadian Psychiatric Association ([www.cpa-apc.org](http://www.cpa-apc.org)).

#### *Psychoanalysis*

Psychoanalysis is a form of psychotherapy derived largely from the writings of Sigmund Freud. As such, it involves establishing a clinical relationship with a patient for the purpose of altering symptoms and promoting more adaptive behaviour. During therapy the focus is usually on the role that unconscious or repressed thoughts and feelings might have in determining how the patient interprets situations or events and how these interpretations, in turn, might influence the way the patient behaves. Depending

on the nature of their training, psychoanalysts may work with preschool children, adolescents, or adults. To be admitted to a training program, it is usually necessary for the candidate to have a doctoral degree in a relevant field such as medicine, psychology, or sociology, although candidates with other qualifications are sometimes accepted. To obtain further information contact the Canadian Psychoanalytic Society ([www.psychanalysis.ca](http://www.psychanalysis.ca)).

### *Social Work*

The field of social work is quite broad. Those who enter the field may provide counselling and therapy to help clients deal with personal problems. Alternatively, they may work with families to determine which community services are most appropriate for meeting the family's needs. They may also be involved in investigating cases of child abuse or neglect and recommend protective action if required. Generally speaking, they tend to work in agencies as members of multidisciplinary teams. At present, the minimum entry level requirement is a four-year university undergraduate degree in social work. Those with a degree in another field normally require two years of graduate work in social work to enter the field. The Canadian Association of Social Workers can provide further information on training requirements, employment opportunities, etc. ([www.casw-acts.ca](http://www.casw-acts.ca)).

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While all of the above, with the exception of human resources, require a university education, it is also worth keeping in mind, if you decide not to attend university, the various programs available through the publicly and privately supported community college system. Both systems offer training in a number of fields that lead to work in the helping professions. The following programs are only a few of the areas that one may wish to pursue in the publicly-supported system.

- Aboriginal Community Worker
- Addiction Counsellor
- Assaulted Women's and Children's Counsellor
- Career and Work Counsellor
- Child and Youth Worker
- Correctional Worker
- Early Childhood Education
- Infant and Toddler Care
- Native Counsellor
- Personal Support Worker
- Psychosocial Rehabilitation
- Social Service Worker

In the privately supported system, it is possible to choose from among an equally large number of options, some of which may not be readily available in the public system such as Conflict Management, Gerontology and Senior Services, and Life Skills Coach. For detailed information on the range of programs available across Canada through both systems go to [www.cicic.ca](http://www.cicic.ca), and follow the link to Education in Canada.

## IS PSYCHOLOGY THE RIGHT CHOICE FOR ME?

Among those undergraduate psychology majors who do decide to pursue advanced training in psychology, nearly half hope to become professional psychologists. Generally speaking, this means seeking a career in the clinical or counselling areas with the aim of opening a private practice or working in a hospital or clinic. Of the remaining subfields, some of the more popular ones are social, developmental, educational, school, and industrial/organizational. There are several ways to determine whether these or any of the other subfields mentioned above are likely to be suitable career choices. An appropriate starting point is to seek vocational guidance through a career counsellor.

A properly trained career counsellor is a person with a university degree plus advanced training in the field of vocational guidance. Although many career counsellors are in private practice, many others are employed in high school and university settings. Their training enables them to administer and interpret tests and inventories that provide information on an individual's personality, abilities and interests in relation to various career options. Among the most widely used commercially available instruments are the Strong Interest Inventory, the Kuder Occupational Interest Survey, and the Campbell Interest and Skills Survey (Carson and Davis, 2000). To obtain the names of qualified individuals in private practice in or near your community contact the Canadian Counselling Association at [www.ccacc.ca](http://www.ccacc.ca), and follow the link entitled "Public Information."

A note of caution is in order, however. Today there are a number of self-administered inventories available on the internet. While some have been well researched and are quite reputable, others are locally produced, poorly researched, and therefore may provide misleading information. If you do wish to use the internet as a starting point in thinking about your career options, helpful information is available through a number of sources on the Ontario School Counsellors' Association web site ([www.osca.ca](http://www.osca.ca)). To avoid misinterpreting the advice you receive from any of these sources, though, the results should only be considered as guides for further exploration, not as final answers. Obtaining a professional opinion is still strongly recommended.

In addition to seeking vocational guidance from a career counsellor, if you are considering becoming a clinical psychologist, volunteering in any of the local agencies in your community that provide assistance to people in need of emotional support is perhaps one of the best ways of helping you determine whether to become a clinician. Experiencing first hand the challenges of helping someone in need of support can be extremely important in guiding your decision. Still another way is to speak to a practising psychologist. For example, if you are interested in becoming a school psychologist and would like to know what working in the field is like on a day-by-day basis, contact a local board of education and arrange to speak with one of their staff. Alternatively, if you are interesting in pursuing a research career as a social psychologist or developmental psychologist, for example, contact a nearby university and arrange to speak with a faculty member who does research in areas that are of interest to you. Needless to say, the knowledge gained by speaking with someone already in the field could also prove invaluable in helping you make a proper career choice.

## HOW TO BECOME A PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST

“Cheshire Puss” she began, rather timidly... “Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to walk from here?”

“That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.” said the Cat. (Gray, 1971, p. 51)

The underlying message in this classic dialogue from *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, refers to the importance of knowing one’s final goal, then working backwards from that goal to achieve a given objective. Because the final goal of training to become a professional psychologist is a license to practice, you should become familiar with the licensing (also called “registration”) requirements across Canada. Knowing these requirements will help you decide (1) whether you truly wish to pursue this goal, and (2) the route to follow if you do decide to become a practitioner.

To obtain a license or registration in Canada, a person must have training beyond the undergraduate level. This graduate training consists of either two years of additional work to obtain a master’s degree, or three to five years of further work past the master’s to obtain a doctoral degree. There is also the need to ensure that certain course requirements have been satisfied, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Hence, we begin with a discussion of licensing, which differs somewhat from province to province, followed by information on the training available at the undergraduate level. We conclude with suggestions for selecting an appropriate graduate training program for students primarily interested in becoming practitioners.

### Licensing

As mentioned above, licensing requirements differ across Canada. As of this writing, it is possible to become licensed as a psychologist with a master’s degree and engage in independent practice (though some restrictions may apply) in Alberta, New Brunswick, Newfoundland/Labrador, Northwest Territories, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan, and Prince Edward Island. This is not the case, however, in British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec. Here training to the doctoral level is required before a person can call him or herself a psychologist. Although persons in British Columbia, Manitoba and Ontario with a master’s degree can become licensed and engage in independent practice, they cannot use the title “psychologist.” Instead they are referred to as Psychological Associates.

In addition to obtaining a graduate degree, and before the license is granted, in most provinces an applicant typically needs a minimum of one further year of supervised clinical experience by a registered psychologist, and must also pass a written as well as an oral exam. In the case of someone with a master’s who wishes to become a Psychological Associate, anywhere from one to four years of post-degree supervised experience is required. Detailed information on these matters can be found on the web sites established by each of the provincial regulatory bodies (go to [www.cpa.ca/psychologyincanada](http://www.cpa.ca/psychologyincanada) and follow the appropriate links). If you plan to practice in the United States, the following web site has similar information for the United States: [www.asppb.org](http://www.asppb.org). It is also important to consult these web sites for updated information. For example, the College of Psychologists of New Brunswick recently voted to raise the licensing requirement from the master’s to the doctoral degree, a change that will take place in 2011.

With regard to course work, many provinces also specify the nature of the courses a person should complete to qualify for a license. The College of Psychologists of British Columbia, for instance, requires three or more graduate semester hours in such areas as the biological bases of behaviour, social bases of behaviour, history and systems, psychometrics, statistics, research design and intervention. The Nova

Scotia Board of Examiners has even stated that “The (graduate) program should have a body of resident students who are enrolled in that program. Programs that are primarily based on-line are not acceptable to the Board.” Thus any student contemplating graduate training, should certainly be aware of these provisions.

### **Undergraduate Training**

There are nearly 80 universities in Canada that offer students an opportunity to major in psychology. As is the case with licensing, however, there are considerable differences in the nature of their undergraduate programs. One important factor to keep in mind is whether the program offers a four-year honours degree in psychology. The reason is that if you plan to pursue graduate training in psychology in Canada, a four-year Honours Bachelor of Arts (BA) or a four-year Honours Bachelor of Science (BSc), as opposed to a three- or four-year general BA or BSc, is the degree that most graduate departments require.

Many of the universities that offer undergraduate honours degrees in their psychology programs are given in a database compiled by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (go to [www.aucc.ca](http://www.aucc.ca), and follow the links under Canadian Universities/Search Academic Programs). Because the offerings at many universities tend to change over time, it is best to contact the universities you may be interested in for current information on the nature of their programs. The psychology departments in some universities may also require certain high school prerequisites, such as math or biology, before allowing a student to declare a major. Thus, here too it is best to contact the individual universities before applying.

When selecting a university, if your aim is to complete an honours degree with the intention of pursuing graduate training, it may also be helpful to inquire about the admission requirements to the honours programs. Because space in these programs is often limited, admission is not automatic and competition can be quite keen. At most universities, students apply for admission to the honours program in second or third year, not when they apply for university admission. To gain admission to an honours program it is not uncommon for the minimum entry requirement to be an overall 75% average with an 80% average in psychology. Moreover, due to space limitations, not all applicants who meet these minimum requirements will be accepted.

If you are not accepted into an honours program and you still wish to pursue graduate training there are several alternative routes worth considering. In the catalogues issued by most universities, admission to graduate training in psychology stipulates that the candidate must have a university undergraduate honours degree *or its equivalent*. The term equivalent typically means that the student has completed the same number and range of upper level psychology courses that a student in an honours program must complete. If your overall average in these courses is sufficiently high you might very well be competitive. In other words, although an honours degree is the preferred degree, students without such a degree may be able to gain admission if they possess the proper academic credentials. Detailed information on these admission requirements can be obtained by contacting the graduate departments. Links to each of the graduate departments in Canada are available through the Canadian Psychological Association’s web site ([www.cpa.ca/students/cpagraduateguide](http://www.cpa.ca/students/cpagraduateguide)).

In addition to satisfying course and grade requirements, you must also provide evidence that you are capable of fulfilling the research demands of graduate training. For students in an honours program, evidence of this nature is usually obtained in the form of a letter of recommendation from the student’s undergraduate honours thesis supervisor. Because students who have not been accepted into an honours program are normally not permitted to enrol in the honours thesis course, to obtain a letter of recommendation, one possibility is to volunteer as a research assistant to a faculty member in the psychology



department. If you can demonstrate that you are capable of understanding theoretical issues, that you can design appropriate experiments to evaluate these issues, and that you have an adequate grasp of the statistics needed to analyse findings, you should be able to obtain the necessary letter. Another possibility is to enrol in, what is sometimes referred to as an “Independent Study” course. Provided that the psychology department offers such a course, here you would be formally evaluated by a faculty member once you complete a project that might be somewhat similar to a thesis. Not only would you receive a grade in the course, but you would also be able to request a letter of recommendation from your faculty supervisor. Detailed information on how to apply to graduate school is also available on the Canadian Psychological Association’s web site ([www.cpa.ca](http://www.cpa.ca)) under the link to publications.

The second route is to explore graduate offerings in countries other than Canada where an honours degree is not a necessary admission requirement. The American Psychological Association produces a yearly publication entitled *Graduate Study in Psychology* that provides information on more than 500 programs in the United States. This book lists Canadian programs as well, and copies of this publication can be ordered from most large online booksellers and are often available in university libraries. Before leaving the country, however, students who decide to seek training outside Canada with the aim of returning to Canada to practice, should contact the regulatory body in the jurisdiction in which they plan to settle to ensure that the graduate training they receive meets the requirements for licensing.

Finally, for those who would like to obtain applied skills during their undergraduate years, a number of psychology departments also offer opportunities to participate in field placements or work experience co-op programs. A list of universities that house these departments can be found on the website of the Association of Canadian Universities and Colleges ([www.aucc.ca](http://www.aucc.ca)). It should be emphasized, however, that these programs are not intended to provide students with the background needed to call themselves “Psychologists.” Rather the experiences students receive are designed to acquaint them with job opportunities in a variety of human service occupations that they may decide to pursue following graduation.

Many co-op programs involve planned semesters of study and employment (often paid) in an area selected by the student. At the University of Waterloo in Ontario, for example, psychology majors in the past have had an opportunity to work for agencies such as Correctional Services of Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and Human Resources Development Canada as well as companies such as the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, Imperial Oil, and Xerox. As an illustration of a specific work experience, at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia a recent placement included a Seniors Centre where the student served as a Programs and Services Assistant responsible for organizing and coordinating social events, trips, and special events for seniors.

### **Suggested Training for a Career in Clinical Psychology**

Training in clinical psychology at the graduate level follows either of two approaches usually referred to as the scientist-practitioner model versus the scholar-practitioner model. The scientist-practitioner model was formally approved in 1949 whereas the scholar-practitioner model is a more recent innovation that received formal approval in 1973. While the final level of training under both models is the doctorate, schools that adhere to the scientist-practitioner model award the Doctor of Philosophy degree (Ph.D.); those that follow the scholar-practitioner model award a Doctor of Psychology degree (Psy.D.). Both schools may also award a master’s degree to students who might not wish to complete doctoral training.

Aside from the difference in degree designation (Ph.D. vs Psy.D.) the truly important difference between the two models centres on the role of research during training (Allon et al., 2004). In the scientist-practitioner model (which leads to the Ph.D.), students are trained to become producers of original

research. This means that in addition to gaining the clinical skills needed to become practitioners, they must also demonstrate proficiency in generating new scientific knowledge. Therefore, considerable time is devoted throughout training to the planning and executing of novel empirical studies. In contrast, although they are expected to understand and use the findings from research, students who receive training under the scholar-practitioner model (which leads to the Psy.D.) are not expected to become “producers” of research. Other than this, both models require that students demonstrate competency in all of the remaining areas of study.

In 1998 the Board of Directors of the Canadian Psychological Association endorsed both models as appropriate for graduate training in psychology. For students who are primarily interested in pursuing a career as practitioners but are less interested in becoming researchers, the Psy.D. could be a promising avenue to explore. To date there are five training programs in Canada that offer the Psy.D. (Université Laval, Université du Québec a Montreal, Université du Québec a Trois-Rivieres, Université de Sherbrooke, and Memorial University of Newfoundland). Because the Canadian Psychological Association is encouraging the development of Psy.D. programs elsewhere in Canada, it is quite possible that more will appear in the future. In the meantime, however, there are more than 60 Psy.D. programs in the United States that have been accredited by the American Psychological Association (Norcross and Castle, 2002). Similar to the recommendation given above, however, students who elect to attend a Psy.D. program in the United States, but plan to practice in Canada, should consult the appropriate regulatory body in Canada concerning licensing before making a final decision.

## OCCUPATIONAL OUTLOOK

As mentioned earlier, the vast majority of undergraduate students who major in psychology do not go on for further training. Instead, they enter the workforce after receiving their BA or BSc degree. Because of the need for licensing, this means that it is unlikely that they will find employment directly related to the helping professions unless they subsequently enrol in an appropriate community college program. For this reason it may be helpful to know the skills that employers typically expect to find among those who major in psychology and who seek jobs immediately after graduating. While many of these skills can be acquired through undergraduate course work, others are likely to result through extra-curricular activities such as part-time and summer jobs, volunteer experiences, or membership in various campus organizations. The following list is based on material in an article by Landrum and Harrold (2003) entitled “*What employers want from psychology graduates.*”

Needless to say, not all of the skills given below will be required for all jobs. However, it may be useful to acquire as many as possible during your undergraduate years in order to develop a marketable resume when attempting to enter a competitive employment field.

### *Skills Normally Gained Through Course Work in Psychology*

- ability to suggest solutions based on knowledge of human behaviour
- ability to write proposals and reports
- ability to problem solve and think analytically
- ability to prioritize assignments and manage time
- ability to make oral presentations
- ability to design research and perform statistical analyses using computer technology

### *Skills Normally Gained Through Jobs or Volunteer Activities*

- ability to work with others as part of a team
- ability to lead
- ability to motivate and influence people

In addition to itemizing your skills, a cover letter requesting an interview with a prospective employer should also contain relevant information about prior work experiences, courses completed, grades, honours, etc. During the interview it is not uncommon for employers to look for characteristics such as enthusiasm, interpersonal skills and the ability to communicate.

If you do decide to seek employment immediately after graduating, what kinds of jobs or promising career paths are typically available to students who have an undergraduate degree in psychology? A number of books listed in the recommended readings section of this document provide numerous examples. Other sources of information are web sites developed by the various psychology departments (see for example, [www.augustana.ab.ca](http://www.augustana.ab.ca), and follow the links through degree programs & courses, social science, psychology careers). Postings sometimes also appear in announcements issued by hospitals, clinics, camps, youth centres, universities, and specialised settings such as shelters for abused individuals. For additional entry level positions, when an undergraduate major in psychology is combined with a minor in other areas such as business or sociology, visit [www.psywww.com/careers/entry.htm](http://www.psywww.com/careers/entry.htm). The following are a few examples that normally do not require training beyond the BA/BSc but may require relevant volunteer or work experience. Up-to-date information on the job prospects in Canada for over 200 occupational groups including many of the ones given below can be found on <http://www.jobfutures.ca/en/home.shtml>.



- claims specialist
- customer relations officer
- data management specialist
- management trainee
- market research analyst
- probation and correctional service worker
- public opinion surveyor
- public relations worker
- real estate agent
- research assistant
- sales representative

For students who obtain either an MA/MSc or Ph.D/Psy.D., the employment situation is quite different. On the Job Futures web site given above, which was developed by the Government of Canada, the work prospects outlook through 2009 received a high rating with a projected average unemployment rate of only 1%. For examples of current job openings, salary ranges, etc. visit the Canadian Psychological Association's web site ([www.cpa.ca](http://www.cpa.ca)) and follow the link to careers.

## HOW TO SUCCEED IN UNIVERSITY

In Canada and the United States, about 20% to 25% of first year students do not proceed to second year (Wintre, Bowers, Gordner, and Lange, 2006). In fact, only about 50% of students complete their undergraduate training in four years (Montgomery & Cote, 2003). While perhaps another 25% will finish at a later date, many never graduate. Although the reasons for leaving university vary, poor academic performance is one of the major contributing factors. Of those who fail to graduate approximately 40% have grade point averages well below the university standard and as many as 25% are asked to leave due to extremely poor grades (Rummel, Acton, Costello, and Pielow, 1999).

Aside from overall ability, there are certain characteristics that typify beginning university students who are successful and subsequently graduate versus those who are not. Over the years, a number of investigators have addressed this issue (see, for example, Harackiewicz, Barron, Tauer, & Elliot, 2002; Snyder et al., 2002) and have reached the following conclusions.

### *Successful students usually:*

- display a strong intrinsic motivation to achieve a certain career goal
- have a desire to learn as much as possible in courses related to that goal
- exhibit a willingness to take challenging courses and to work for the highest possible grades in those courses.

### *Unsuccessful students usually:*

- have uncertain or undefined career aspirations
- are likely to enrol in courses they considered easy
- devote only a minimal amount of effort to their studies.

In addition to the foregoing characteristics, successful students typically make use of certain tactics that are known to be extremely helpful in enabling them to accomplish their goal. They assess the demands of their assignments, plan strategies to meet these demands by engaging in effective time management practices, and constantly monitor their progress in meeting these demands.

To illustrate how these tactics are employed consider the following example. On the first day of class in the fall semester (September 10) students in a psychology course are assigned a 15-20 page essay. The assignment is due on November 30 and the instructor informs the students that the essay must focus on one of several topics listed in the course outline.

Using a computer-based calendar (e.g., Microsoft Outlook), or a daily or weekly planner available in most stationery stores, the successful student establishes a series of deadlines or completion dates for each phase of the assignment similar to the ones shown below.

September 15:	Select a topic
September 20:	Develop reading list (perhaps in consultation with the instructor)
October 10:	Finish the readings
October 15:	Summarize and organize the notes from the readings
October 20:	Prepare an outline of the essay in point form
October 30:	Finish a rough draft of the essay
November 1-20:	Work on revised drafts
November 25-29:	Review and polish the final draft
November 30:	Submit the essay

The student then monitors his or her progress to ensure that all of these deadlines are met. To prepare for upcoming exams, the same procedure is followed; all reading assignments are reduced to a series of small, manageable units spread over the semester.

The unsuccessful student, on the other hand, rarely engages in time management. Instead, the student typically procrastinates and begins work shortly before the assignments are due. In one study that involved students enrolled in an introductory psychology course, the investigators found that 46% reported procrastinating when given a term paper assignment and 30% procrastinated when given weekly reading assignments (Schouwenburg, 1995). If these students were taking a normal five-course work load with similar sets of assignments and deadlines in each course, it is not difficult to imagine why they might encounter serious academic problems. Due to the heightened stress and anxiety that necessarily accompanies each approaching deadline, they could easily become overwhelmed and increasingly less able to focus on their studies. The problem, of course, is that once they experience failure, fear of additional failure may occur which, by itself, is known to lead to further procrastination (Smith, 2002). Indeed, when the students in the introductory psychology course were asked why they procrastinate, fear of failure was one of the primary motives. Needless to say, repeated episodes of procrastination could very well lead to a cascade of extremely poor grades which ultimately might result in academic probation or even dismissal.

Today most if not all universities offer assistance to students free of charge in a variety of areas that usually include learning skills development. Students who visit a specialist in this area are not only shown how to acquire proper study habits but also receive assistance in developing effective time management strategies. If you have difficulty with time management, you should seek help. Once you master the strategies, the benefits of using these strategies will be apparent throughout your university career.

## RECOMMENDED READINGS

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