

1

COLLEGE AND THE PSYCHOLOGY DEGREE

OUTLINE

Why College?

Who Goes to College?

Why Earn a College Degree

Employment and Salaries

Social Mobility

Cognitive and Psychosocial Development

Social Relationships

Health and Happiness

Adjusting to College

First-Generation Students

Adult Learners

What Is Psychology?

Behavioral Neuroscience

Clinical Psychology

Cognitive Psychology

Community Psychology

Counseling Psychology

Developmental Psychology

Educational Psychology

Experimental Psychology

Forensic Psychology

Health Psychology

Human Factors Psychology

Industrial-Organizational Psychology

Quantitative Psychology and Psychometrics

School Psychology

Social Psychology

Degrees in Psychology

Bachelor's Degree in Psychology

Master's Degree in Psychology

Doctoral Degree in Psychology

Myths About Psychology

Myth: Psychology Is Just Common Sense

Myth: Psychology Is Not a Real Science

Myth: Psychologists Can Read Your Mind

Myth: Majoring in Psychology Will Make You a Psychologist

Myth: You Can't Get a Job With a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology

Overview of *The Psychology Major's Handbook*

More young people attend college than ever before. A college degree can be a powerful tool for social mobility—helping young people to improve their living conditions and welfare and achieve their dreams. Yet it's not uncommon to hear someone say, perhaps tongue-in-cheek, that a college diploma today is what a high school degree was generations ago, a basic requirement that nearly everyone completes. Although this might make intuitive sense, it isn't true. Not everyone enrolls in college. In 2021 only about 62% of recent high school graduates entered college (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023b). Less than half of entering college students (47%) earn a bachelor's degree within 4 years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021b). Attending college is not a given. Completing it is even less so. The purpose of this book is to help students, like you, take control of their education, to realize that it is a choice, and to empower them to seek and take advantage of opportunities. We begin by examining a common question: Is college worth it?

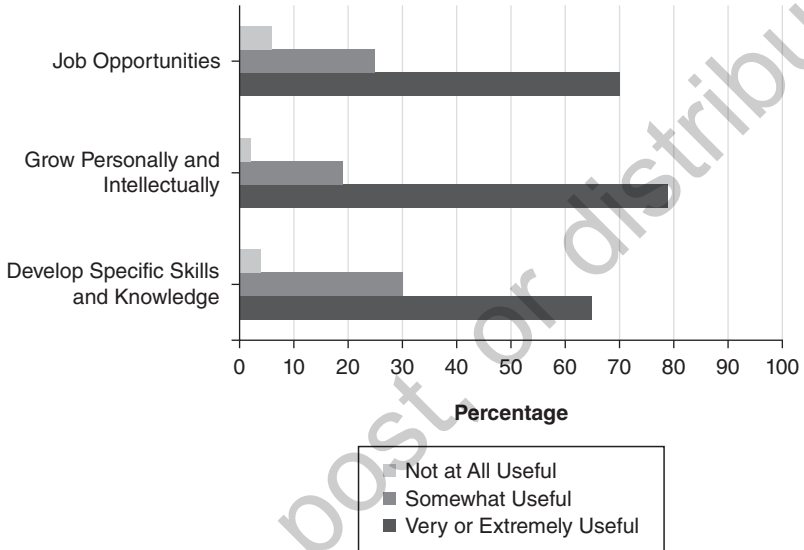
WHY COLLEGE?

The first and most important question to ask is this: Is college worth it? The quick answer is that it depends on who you ask. Public opinion surveys reveal mixed views about the value of college. In one recent survey, 56% of adults agreed that a college education is “not worth the cost because people often graduate without specific job skills and with a large amount of debt to pay off” (Lederman, 2023). In contrast, in another survey, 55% of adults agreed higher education is needed for financial security, specifically an associate's degree (16%), bachelor's degree (30%), or advanced degree (9%) (Fishman et al., 2022). At least three-quarters of the adults surveyed agreed that education beyond high school is a good value for students and that 4-year colleges contribute to a strong workforce.

Views about the value of college tend to vary with education. For example, about three-quarters of adults with bachelor's degrees agreed that a college education is worth the time and cost, compared with one-half of adults without a bachelor's degree (Finley et al., 2021). As shown in Figure 1.1, bachelor's degree holders tend to view

their college education positively (Parker, 2021). Moreover, employers agree. Eighty-seven percent of employers surveyed by the American Association of Colleges and Universities agreed that a college degree is definitely or probably worth the investment (Finley et al., 2021).

FIGURE 1.1 ■ College Graduates' Rating of the Usefulness of Their College Education for Career and Personal Development



Source: Pew Research Center. (2021, October). *2021 Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Higher-ed-post-Topline-W98.pdf>

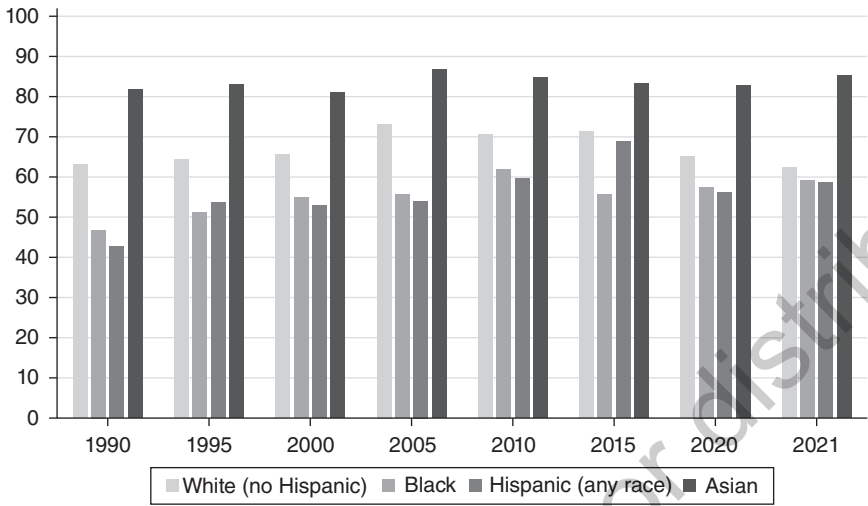
How do we make sense of these mixed views about the value of a college education? Ironically, the critical thinking and problem-solving skills developed through a college education help us to evaluate multiple perspectives on questions such as this. Next, we examine reasons to earn a college degree, its benefits, and how college graduates differ from their peers who did not attend college.

Who Goes to College?

As we have discussed, about 62% of high school graduates enter college (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022a). College enrollment has increased for all young people, but as shown in Figure 1.2, the increase is larger for typically marginalized groups, Black and Hispanic students.

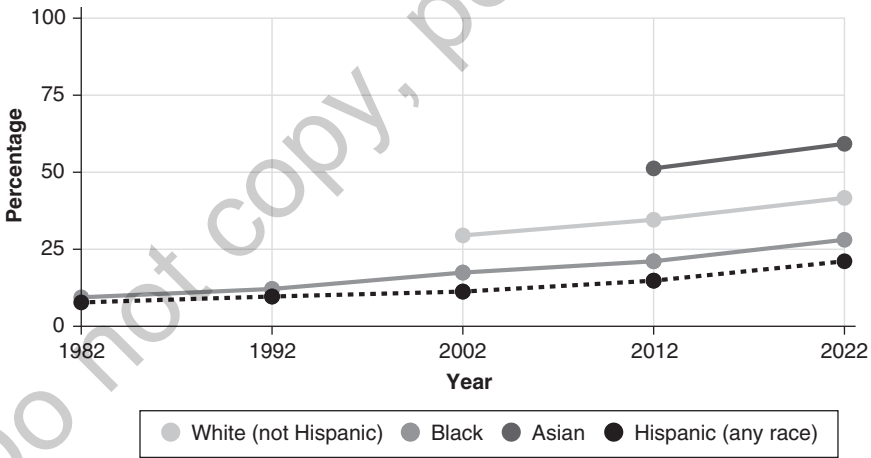
Similarly, in recent decades, the percentage of adults over age 25 with college degrees has increased for all people but especially for marginalized groups (Figure 1.3). There are many benefits of attending college, as discussed next.

FIGURE 1.2 ■ Percentage of Recent High School Completers Enrolled in College, by Race/Ethnicity, 2021



Source: National Center for Education Statistics. (2022a). *Digest of educational statistics*. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22_302.20.asp

FIGURE 1.3 ■ Educational Attainment, Age 25 and Older, 2022



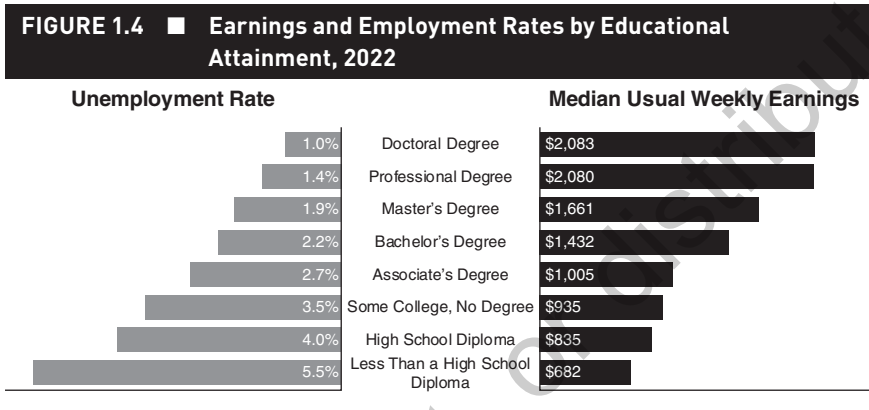
Source: U.S. Census Bureau. (2023b, February 16). *Educational attainment, age 25 and older, 2022*. <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2022/demo/educational-attainment/cps-detailed-tables.html>

Why Earn a College Degree?

There are both tangible and intangible benefits to earning a college degree.

Employment and Salaries

A college degree has employment and economic value. In 2022, bachelor's degree holders earned about 40% more and were about half as likely to be unemployed than their peers with high school degrees (Figure 1.4) (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023).



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2023b, May). *Education pays, 2022*. <https://www.bls.gov/career-outlook/2023/data-on-display/education-pays.htm>

Social Mobility

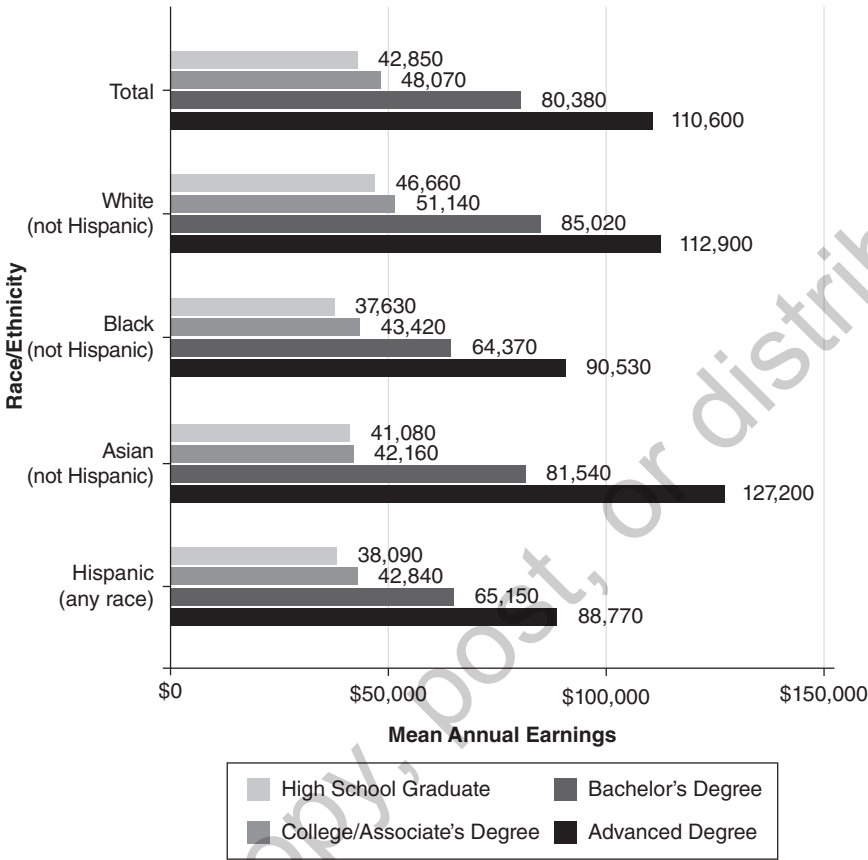
As noted, a college degree is associated with higher salaries, on average. However, there are racial and ethnic disparities in salaries at all levels of education, as shown in Figure 1.5. On average, Black and Hispanic workers in the United States earn 76 and 73 cents, respectively, for each dollar white workers earn (Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs, 2020). Despite these differences, for marginalized young people, the increased income associated with a college degree can change their environment, circumstances, and future opportunities.

Cognitive and Psychosocial Development

The employment and salary benefits of a college degree are noteworthy; however, attending college is associated with many other benefits throughout life.

Adults often describe their college years as influential in shaping their thoughts, values, and worldview (Patton et al., 2016). A college education exposes people to different perspectives and encourages people to experiment with alternative behavior, beliefs, and values. College courses that require students to construct arguments and solve complex problems foster cognitive development (King & Kitchener, 2016). In addition to intellectual growth, college students show advances in identity development, social development, and moral reasoning (Hassan, 2008; Lapsley & Hardy,

FIGURE 1.5 ■ Mean Salaries for Workers 18 Years and Older, by Educational Attainment, Race, and Ethnicity Median Salary



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. (2023a, February 9). CPS historical time series tables, Table A-3.

2017; Patton et al., 2016). Research indicates that all institutions of higher education, public and private, selective and open enrollment, advance cognitive and psychological development (Mayhew et al., 2016). Rather than the type of institution attended, developmental outcomes are most influenced by student involvement in campus life and peer interaction in academic and social contexts. Students who are active in campus life and feel a sense of belonging are more likely to persist and succeed in college (Mayhew et al., 2016). Later in this book, we will discuss ways of taking an active approach to your education.

Social Relationships

Throughout adulthood, college graduates tend to have larger social networks, more close friends, and perceive higher levels of social support (Cox, 2021). College graduates

are more likely to marry and have happier marriages (Cohn, 2011). They are also more likely to be satisfied with their jobs (Cox, 2016). Why? College presents social demands that provide opportunities to develop social skills, teamwork, friendships, and build a network. In addition to more close friendships, college graduates tend to have more informal friendships, so called “weak ties” that are a source of connection and social support.

Health and Happiness

College graduates tend to be healthier and live longer lives (Roy et al., 2020, pp. 1985–2017). Social support is positively associated with health and contributes to health differences between college graduates and their peers who have not attended college (Zajacova & Lawrence, 2018). In addition, the employment opportunities associated with a college degree facilitate the accumulation of wealth that enables them to live in communities that support health, with recreational opportunities and access to groceries and health care. College graduates also tend to have healthier diets, are less likely to smoke, and are more likely to exercise (Lawrence, 2017). Finally, research suggests that college graduates are happier than their peers, likely influenced by all of these factors (Florida et al., 2013).

EXERCISE: WHY COLLEGE?

1. What are your reasons for attending college? What do you hope to learn about your field of study? What do you hope to achieve academically and, especially, personally?
2. How is college different from high school? What are your experiences and how do you feel about the increased autonomy and decision-making that comes with college life? Give examples of these differences.

Adjusting to College

Entering college students soon learn that college is very different from high school. The main difference is in autonomy, the freedom to make and carry out decisions, big and small. College students must make choices about majors, what courses to take, when and how much to study, and whether to attend class. Frequently college students make choices about where to live, with whom, and how to afford their lifestyle. Students also become more responsible for deciding what and when to eat, whether to exercise and how much, and how to maintain their health. Even students who live with their families and commute to school must make these decisions. Perhaps what’s most challenging about the transition to college is not just about college, it is about becoming a responsible adult.

Newfound independence is exciting but comes with responsibility: to attend class, complete assignments, maintain grades, and balance coursework with “life”—relationships, athletics and extracurricular activity, and often, outside employment. Successful students recognize that they are expected to take the initiative in requesting help, such as speaking with instructors and student support staff, as they face new demands. Motivation and study skills matter but so do communication skills and especially feeling connected to the institution (Robbins et al., 2006).

Students who establish relationships with faculty and other students, view faculty as concerned with their development, and become involved in campus life are more likely to succeed and graduate from college (Mayhew et al., 2016). A sense of belonging matters. When students feel that they are part of a campus community, they are more likely to persist and graduate. It is especially important for commuter students to connect with others and take advantage of campus resources because relationships with other students, even friendly acquaintances, are a powerful source of social support (Bronkema & Bowman, 2019). Today's college students are increasingly diverse, but they can all benefit from a sense of belonging.

First-Generation Students

Entering college poses challenges for all students, but first-generation college students face unique challenges for adjustment. Over one-half (56%) of college students are first-generation students, which means that they have parents who have not earned a college degree (RTI International, 2019a). About one-quarter of college students are the first in their families to pursue higher education or take any college classes (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2022a). Students of color and those of low socioeconomic status are disproportionately likely to be first-generation college students (Gibbons et al., 2019; RTI International, 2019a). They often lack family and peer guidance on how to navigate college successfully, contributing to feelings of isolation that can interfere with adapting to the expectations and demands of college.

First-generation college students experience more stress than their peers (Wilbur, 2021). Over two-thirds of first-generation students work a paid job (RTI International, 2019b). They are more likely to experience economic circumstances that interfere with their studies as well as their ability to participate on campus. When students feel that they are part of a campus community, when they build meaningful relationships with faculty and other students, they are more likely to persist and graduate from college (Mayhew et al., 2016; Feldman, 2017).

Adult Learners

Virtually all research on students' adjustment focuses on what is typically perceived of as the traditional college student, aged roughly between 18 and 22. However, there are many paths and timetables to a college degree. About 25% of college students are over age 24 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022c). These students, commonly

referred to as adult learners or nontraditional students, possess diverse backgrounds and different needs compared to their younger counterparts. Adult learners tend to seek a college degree to learn new skills, change career paths, and be eligible for higher paying and more satisfying careers (Ross-Gordon, 2011). In general, nontraditional students have one, often more, of the following characteristics: delayed enrollment in college after high school, part-time attendance for at least part of an academic year, full-time employment while enrolled in school, financial independence, or having dependents—such as a spouse and/or children (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2022b; Battiste, 2022). These factors present significant challenges to the nontraditional students' college success (MacDonald, 2018).

Adult learners may find themselves juggling multiple life roles, such as being a worker, spouse, parent, and caregiver. Consequently, they frequently face conflicts between the demands of school, family, and work. Work-related travel can disrupt childcare arrangements and academic obligations, leading to class absences and missed assignments. Practical aspects of college, such as scheduling, can prove challenging for many nontraditional students (Osam et al., 2017). Classes that meet two or three days each week often clash with work schedules. Evening classes often meet once per week, convenience at the expense of continuity and frequent contact with professors. Some students may find that required courses are offered only during the day or they may have difficulty accessing advisors and student support services.

A growing segment of nontraditional students in the United States are veterans, who face unique challenges. Like other nontraditional learners, student veterans must prioritize and manage multiple roles, juggle stressors related to work, finances, housing, marriage, and childcare (Alschuler & Yarab, 2018; Sansone & Tucker Segura, 2020). Many student veterans experience emotional or physical health problems, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, traumatic brain injuries, or physical disabilities (Ulrich & Freer, 2020). Despite these stressors, student veterans tend to earn higher grades than their peers and show similar graduation rates as other students (54%) (Institute for Veterans and Military Families, 2019).

Generally speaking, adult learners tend to have strengths that can offset the challenges they face. Adult learners tend to be more academically engaged than their younger peers and show a readiness to learn and a problem-centered orientation that emphasizes acquiring the knowledge and skills needed for career advancement (Rabourn et al., 2018; Ross-Gordon, 2011). Older students tend to have a more extensive knowledge base from which to draw, placing emphasis on seeking meaning and applying what they learn to their lives. Their life experience and multiple roles can help nontraditional learners make meaning of theoretical concepts that may be purely abstract to younger learners (Osam et al., 2017).

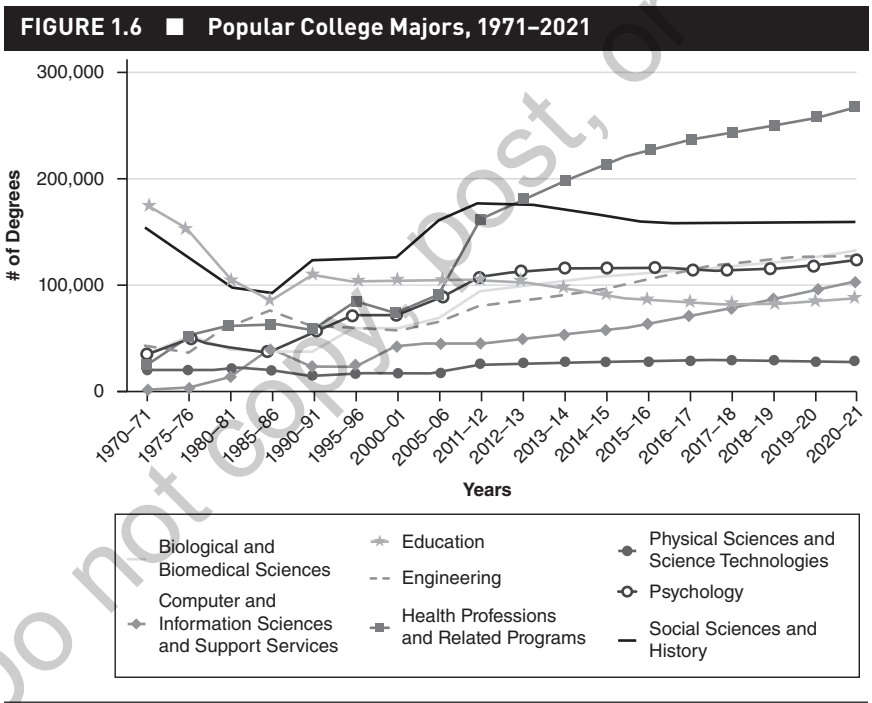
Entering college presents challenges for all students, regardless of whether they are traditional-aged, first-generation, or adult students. Successfully adapting to college life involves developing essential skills, such as time management, effective studying

techniques, and actively engaging in one's education. The chapters in this book provide guidance for developing the necessary skills for a fulfilling college experience.

WHAT IS PSYCHOLOGY?

The biggest decision that you will make as a college student is your major. Your college major determines the courses that you will take and how you will prepare for a career after college. It is worth noting, however, that your college major does not necessarily determine your career. As we will discuss in later chapters, every college major offers opportunities to develop useful skills. There is no “bad” major.

Figure 1.6 illustrates the number of bachelor's degrees awarded over the past 50 years in several popular fields. Psychology is consistently one of the most popular majors, with about 127,000 bachelor's degrees awarded in 2020–2021 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023a, pp. 2020–2021).



Source: National Center for Education Statistics. (2023a). *Digest of educational statistics*. Table 322.10 https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22_322.10.asp?current=yes

What exactly is psychology? Broadly speaking, psychology is defined as *the scientific study of behavior*. Psychologists are scientists who study behavior, anything an animal or a person does, feels, or thinks. Many students are surprised to learn that some

psychologists work with animals. Psychologists often study animal physiology and behavior to extend what they learn to humans. As scientists, psychologists apply precise methods of observation, data collection, analysis, and interpretation to learn about what makes people and animals behave like they do. Psychologists generate hypotheses, or educated guesses, about what might cause a particular behavior or phenomenon, and they conduct careful scientific research to test those hypotheses.

A wide range of topics fall under the umbrella of psychology, and each topic is its own specialized field of study. The following sections present the most common specialties within psychology. In each of these areas, some psychologists spend most of their time conducting research to expand the knowledge base, some practice or apply research findings to help people and communities, and some do both, as scientist-practitioners. In addition, over one-third of psychologists teach and conduct research at colleges and universities. The following sections briefly examine the subfields of psychology, organized in alphabetical order.

Behavioral Neuroscience

Behavioral neuroscience refers to the psychological and physiological study of brain and behavior. How do neurotransmitters influence our behavior? What part of the brain is responsible for motivation, language, or emotion? Behavioral neuroscientists conduct research to answer questions about how the brain influences our emotions and behavior. They teach and conduct scientific research in academic settings, as well as train medical doctors, clinical psychologists, and other health professionals. Some behavioral neuroscientists conduct applied work as part of a health care team assessing and treating persons with brain injuries within neurology, psychiatric, and pediatric units of hospitals, and in clinics.

Clinical Psychology

Clinical psychologists study, diagnose, and treat persons who experience emotional, behavioral, and psychological problems or disorders. Most people are familiar with the practitioner role of a clinical psychologist as it is commonly depicted on television. Clinical psychologists may help people with problems ranging from normative life changes—like helping someone deal with grief or a crisis to more serious and chronic disorders, such as anxiety and mood disorders. Some clinical psychologists work with specific age groups, such as children or older adults. Others specialize in particular problems, such as depression or anxiety. Some psychologists are generalists and treat people of all ages and with all types of problems. Not all clinical psychologists conduct therapy. Many conduct scientific research. For example, clinical psychologists may research risk factors for mental disorders, such as how genetic and environmental factors contribute to mental health. Others study treatments, such as the effectiveness of a given medication, therapy, or intervention. Finally, clinical psychologists work in universities as professors and researchers.

Cognitive Psychology

Cognitive psychology is the scientific study of mind and mental processes. It examines the nature of thought, known as *cognition*. Cognitive psychologists study how we think; specifically, how we take in information, store it, learn, and use it to make decisions. Topics of study include attention, memory, learning, and decision-making. Some cognitive psychologists study these processes in animals and apply what they learn to humans. Some specialize in particular age groups, such as studying attention in infants or memory in older adults. Cognitive psychology is part of a larger interdisciplinary field of *cognitive science*, which includes findings from other research disciplines, such as neuroscience, anthropology, and linguistics. Cognitive psychologists and scientists are found in academic settings as professors and researchers. They are also found in applied settings where they might assist companies in applying cognitive research to improve their products or to better advertise them. For example, internet companies may turn to cognitive psychologists to provide information about how people scan webpages and make decisions online.

Community Psychology

Individuals are embedded in groups, including families, communities, and society. Community psychologists seek to understand how individuals and their communities interact—that is, how communities influence individuals as well as how individuals influence their communities. Community psychologists who conduct applied work may examine how neighborhood resources promote well-being in community members and may create prevention and intervention programs to address emerging problems. Community psychologists work in government settings, such as for city councils, where they might study community functioning and needs to anticipate and address problems before they escalate. Others work in human service settings, for school districts, and as researchers in policy settings. In academic settings, community psychologists teach and conduct research.

Counseling Psychology

Counseling psychologists engage in many of the same activities as clinical psychologists but focus their activities on normative functioning rather than psychological disorders. As researchers, counseling psychologists study how to help people manage everyday life issues, such as divorce, remarriage, career changes, and transitions to and from college. Practicing counseling psychologists help people adjust to life changes and provide vocational assessment and career guidance. Like clinical psychologists, counseling psychologists work in academic settings as professors and researchers and in community settings such as mental health clinics, halfway houses, college counseling centers, criminal justice settings, and social service agencies.

Developmental Psychology

Developmental psychologists study human development across the life span. In academic settings, developmental psychologists teach and conduct scientific research on the emotional, intellectual, and physical development of children, adolescents, and adults. Research topics include a diverse array of issues, such as whether most adults experience a midlife crisis, how babies learn to crawl, or what factors influence adolescent drug use. Developmental psychologists also work as researchers, consultants, and program evaluators in applied settings, such as pediatric hospitals, geriatric centers, and nonprofit organizations. Some developmental psychologists engage in applied activities, such as conducting developmental assessments of children to ensure that they are timely in meeting developmental milestones.

Educational Psychology

Educational psychologists study how people learn and apply that knowledge to educational settings. They develop methods and materials to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of educational programs and curricula designed for people of all ages. Educational psychologists work in academic settings and conduct research on learning and instruction. Some study how people learn to read or complete math problems. Others train teachers and develop methods of instruction to enhance the educational setting.

Experimental Psychology

Experimental psychologists specialize in conducting scientific research. While all psychologists are trained in scientific research, experimental psychologists' education emphasizes methodology and statistics skills. They are experts in conducting research. Experimental psychologists usually focus their research on one topical area within psychology, such as cognition, perception, human performance, or social psychology. Some experimental psychologists study animals to apply what they learn to humans or simply because animal behavior is interesting. Most experimental psychologists are employed in academic settings, teaching and conducting research. Others work as researchers for businesses, corporations, and the government.

Forensic Psychology

Forensic psychologists study legal issues from a psychological perspective. They conduct scientific research on topics such as the reliability of eyewitness testimony, juror selection, and how to interview eyewitnesses without contaminating their testimony. Forensic psychologists apply research findings by providing expert testimony on cases in criminal, civil, and family courts. They may evaluate prisoners, assist in making parole decisions, and assess defendants to determine whether they are competent to

provide testimony. Forensic psychologists work not only with lawyers and judges but also with police departments to select, train, and evaluate police officers. Forensic psychologists are found in academic settings as well as applied settings, such as law firms, government agencies, and policy settings.

Health Psychology

Health psychologists study how psychological, biological, and social factors influence health and illness. They conduct scientific research on health-related topics, such as whether relaxation techniques and social support can help people overcome illness more quickly or how to change people's attitudes about smoking. Health psychologists design, assess, and modify programs to promote health and wellness (e.g., stress management, smoking cessation, and weight loss). They work in academic and research settings, such as universities and medical schools, as well as in applied settings, such as hospitals and clinics.

Human Factors Psychology

Human factors or engineering psychologists study how people interact with machines, environments, and products. They conduct research on how people understand and use machines to increase people's safety, efficiency, and productivity. Human factors psychologists might work on designing a computer monitor to prevent user fatigue and eyestrain, or they might arrange the instruments on a car's dashboard to enhance access and safety. Human factors psychologists design, evaluate, and modify military equipment, airplanes, computer terminals, and consumer products. Most human factors psychologists work in industry and government; some work in academic settings.

Industrial-Organizational Psychology

Industrial and organizational psychologists apply psychological principles and scientific research findings to the workplace. They are concerned with the relation between people and work. Industrial and organizational psychologists often work for companies, corporations, and the government, studying how to recruit, select, train, and evaluate employees. They conduct applied research on questions like what personality factors make a good employee, how to improve worker productivity, and characteristics of effective leaders. Industrial and organizational psychologists develop programs to improve employee morale and make the workplace more efficient and pleasant. Others teach and conduct research as members of academic departments in psychology and business.

Quantitative Psychology and Psychometrics

Quantitative psychologists study and develop new scientific methods and techniques for acquiring, analyzing, and applying information. Quantitative psychologists help other researchers in designing, conducting, and interpreting experiments. Psychometricians,

a type of quantitative psychologist, specialize in testing. They create and revise psychological tests, intelligence tests, and aptitude tests. Quantitative psychologists and psychometricians work as researchers in academic, business, and government settings.

School Psychology

School psychologists work to foster the intellectual, emotional, educational, and social development of children. They apply the science of psychology to the school environment. School psychologists conduct research on educational topics, such as how the classroom climate influences student learning or how to promote appropriate behavior in the classroom. They work in schools to assess and counsel students, work with parents and teachers, and develop behavioral interventions.

Social Psychology

Social psychologists study how people interact with each other and how they are influenced by the social environment. They conduct research on personality theories, attitude formation and change, persuasion and conformity, and how people relate to one another, including attraction, prejudice, group dynamics, teamwork, and aggression. Social psychologists work in academic settings as teachers and researchers, but they also work for corporations and advertising agencies, conducting marketing research and studying how consumers view products.

Clearly, psychology is diverse and entails much more than conducting therapy with patients relaxing on leather sofas. Instead, the field of psychology offers a variety of careers in direct service, academics, government, and business. That is, not all psychologists conduct therapy or even study people. What all of the subfields of psychology have in common, however, is a concern with understanding the causes of behavior.

TABLE 1.1 ■ Subfields in Psychology

Subfield	Emphasis
Behavioral Neuroscience	Brain and behavior
Clinical Psychology	Emotional, behavioral, and psychological problems or disorders
Community Psychology	Interactions between individuals and their communities
Counseling Psychology	Normative function and healthy adaptation
Developmental Psychology	Optimizing human development across the life span
Educational Psychology	Understanding how people learn and modifying educational settings accordingly
Experimental Psychology	Scientific methodology and research

(Continued)

TABLE 1.1 ■ Subfields in Psychology (Continued)

Subfield	Emphasis
Forensic Psychology	Applying psychology to inform and study legal issues
Health Psychology	Psychological, biological, and social influences on health and wellness
Human Factors or Engineering Psychology	People's interactions with machines, environments, and products
Industrial and Organizational Psychology	Optimizing the workplace
Quantitative Psychology and Psychometrics	Devising techniques for acquiring, measuring, and analyzing
School Psychology	Fostering children's development in the school setting
Social Psychology	People's interactions with each other and the social environment

PRO TIP**INTRODUCTORY PSYCHOLOGY IS A WHIRLWIND TOUR**

It's not uncommon for students to find the Introductory or General Psychology course tough. There's a good reason for that: Introductory Psychology presents the entire field of psychology at a whirlwind and dizzying pace. As you learn, try to remember that each chapter of your Introductory Psychology text presents an overview of an entire subfield of psychology—an area in which psychologists specialize and spend their entire lives working. If you find a particular chapter interesting, note that your college offers at least one and often more than one course in that area. If you find a chapter (and thus subfield) uninteresting, the good part about the Introductory Psychology course is that you'll move on to a different chapter and different subfield in just a week or two.

EXERCISE 1.1**SUBFIELDS OF PSYCHOLOGY**

Choose three subfields of psychology. For each:

1. Explain the subfield in more detail than provided here.
2. Identify at least one psychologist in the subfield and discuss his or her work.
3. Describe two other topics of research conducted by psychologists in the subfield.

DEGREES IN PSYCHOLOGY

Before we begin our discussion about education in psychology, it is important to note that a bachelor's degree prepares students for a wide range of careers. Graduate study entails more specialized training, as discussed in the following sections, but is not needed to have a successful career.

Bachelor's Degree in Psychology

The bachelor's degree, a bachelor's of arts (BA) or bachelor's of science (BS) degree, typically is the culmination of 4 years of undergraduate study. Whether a student earns a BA or BS often depends on the university they attend rather than the program's rigor. Psychology students are awarded BA degrees in some universities and BS degrees in others, yet their education usually is identical. Most students who earn bachelor's degrees enter the work world after graduation, working in business and human service settings (see Chapter 3). Some enroll in graduate school to earn advanced degrees, a master's degree or doctoral degree.

Master's Degree in Psychology

The master's degree is a graduate degree that typically requires 2 years of study beyond the bachelor's degree. There are many different types of master's degrees, most commonly the MA (master of arts) and MS (master of science). Requirements for service-oriented fields, such as clinical, counseling, and school psychology, usually include practical experience in an applied setting, which may span longer than the 2 years of coursework.

What can you do with a master's degree? Depending on the program and curriculum, a master's degree enables graduates to do the following: (a) teach psychology in high school (other certification may be needed); (b) become more competitive for jobs in government and industry; (c) practice industrial/organizational psychology in business settings; (d) obtain certification to practice school psychology (depending on state); and (e) obtain certification as a counselor or marriage and family therapist and practice counseling. Students who are interested in graduate study for the sole purpose of becoming a therapist should carefully consider a master's degree as it is a quicker, cheaper alternative to a doctoral degree that can fulfill certification requirements to practice. Can master's trained individuals provide effective therapy? Studies have shown that there are no convincing differences in therapeutic outcomes as a function of the practitioner's level of training (Atkins & Christensen, 2001; Seligman, 1995). A far greater number of students pursue master's degrees than doctoral degrees in psychology.

Doctoral Degree in Psychology

A doctoral degree provides a greater range of flexibility and autonomy than the master's degree, but it requires a greater commitment of time and money. A doctoral

degree typically requires 4 to 7 years to complete (and longer for some students). In clinical, counseling, and school psychology, the requirement for the doctoral degree generally includes a year or more of internship or supervised experience. Why do students seek doctoral degrees? Generally, students pursue doctoral degrees for any of the following reasons: (a) to teach college; (b) to conduct research in a university or private organization in industry or business; (c) to practice clinical psychology without supervision; or (d) to engage in a variety of consulting roles allowing autonomy.

There are several types of doctoral degrees in psychology; each provides training that prepares students for specific professional activities. The PhD refers to the doctor of philosophy. Like the master's degree, the PhD is awarded in many fields. It is a research degree that culminates in a dissertation based on original research. PhD graduates may work as researchers and as practitioners in a variety of settings. The PsyD refers to the doctor of psychology. It is offered only in clinical and counseling psychology and is considered a professional degree, much like a JD (doctor of jurisprudence, a lawyer's degree). The PsyD emphasizes practice; students become expert practitioners but do not become researchers. The doctor of education (EdD), a third doctoral option for psychology students, is less common than the PhD and PsyD. The EdD is offered in departments of education, and its graduates often work in the field of education and educational psychology as researchers, administrators, and professors. We discuss graduate degrees in more depth in Chapter 11.

In short, there are many levels of education in psychology and many educational paths that will prepare you to work with people. Not all psychology majors will become psychologists. In fact, the vast majority will not. This is an example of the many common misconceptions about the field of psychology.

MYTHS ABOUT PSYCHOLOGY

Try this experiment: As you go about your day, at home, work, and school, ask the people you meet a simple question, "What's psychology?" Or for more interesting answers, "What do you think of psychology?" You'll find that everyone knows a little something about psychology. But knowledge is often intermingled with misconceptions. Some of the common myths or misconceptions about psychology are as follows.

Myth: Psychology Is Just Common Sense

Common sense refers to the knowledge that anyone with sound reasoning capacities should know. Many people believe that psychology research simply confirms what "everyone knows." Yet some psychology findings are counterintuitive. For example, promoting children's self-esteem does not improve their school performance, some people are not "right brained" or "left brained," and students do not learn better when teachers match their learning style (Baumeister et al., 2003; Corballis et al., 2014;

Gazzaniga, 1998). Just because something seems that it should be true, doesn't mean that it is. That's why we test our hypotheses—and often find that folk beliefs are false. As you study psychology, you'll encounter many research findings that will make you think twice about what you believe is “common sense.”

Myth: Psychology Is Not a Real Science

Let's consider the nature of science. *Science* refers to the process of building and acquiring knowledge about natural phenomena through the use of systematic observation and experimentation. Scientists collect empirical evidence (data) to develop and test explanations for phenomena. They create theories to explain observations and generate hypotheses to systematically test their theories. Through the application of the scientific method, scientists systematically test and revise hypotheses in light of their data. Psychologists use this very process—the scientific method—in conducting research in which they test hypotheses about human and animal behavior.

Myth: Psychologists Can Read Your Mind

If you choose to major in psychology, don't be surprised if someone, a friend or family member, jokes or even seriously asks about your emerging ability to read minds. A psychology education does not impart the ability to read other people's minds (if only!). You will, however, gain insight into people's behavior, and that knowledge may make it seem to others as if you have a portal into their minds.

EXERCISE 1.2

PSYCHOLOGY IN THE MEDIA

Locate a magazine article or website describing a research finding having to do with psychology.

1. Provide a brief summary of the findings as described in the article.
2. Explain what subfield of psychology the research represents.
3. Consider the findings described in the article. What further questions do you have? What questions should be addressed next? If you were the researcher whose work was mentioned in article, what would you try to learn next?
4. Locate the research study cited in the article (if a link isn't provided, try searching for the researchers' names).
5. Read the abstract and provide a one-sentence explanation of the authors' findings.
6. Compare the description provided in the abstract with the magazine or web article. How accurately are the research findings portrayed? Why do you think there are (or are not) discrepancies?

Myth: Majoring in Psychology Will Make You a Psychologist

One of the most important things that psychology majors must understand is that the bachelor's degree in psychology does not prepare graduates to be psychologists. It typically takes another 5 to 8 years of study after the bachelor's degree to become a practicing psychologist.

Myth: You Can't Get a Job With a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology

This is a very common but, fortunately, false belief. As we will discuss in Chapter 3, employers seek specific skills in potential hires, such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and communication. Students have a wealth of opportunities to develop and strengthen skills that employers seek. The challenge that all job seekers face, regardless of their major, is communicating their abilities to potential employers. In 2019 the unemployment rate for bachelor degree holders in psychology age 25 to 29 was 2.9%, similar to that in STEM fields (3.0%), business (2.9%), and engineering (2.7%) and not measurably different from the median for all 25 to 29 year olds with bachelor's degrees (2.8%) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021c). About 64% of all people in the United States who hold a bachelor's degree in psychology, regardless of age, believe that their jobs are related to their degree (Lin et al., 2018). Yes, you can get a job with a psychology degree. In later chapters, we examine how.

OVERVIEW OF THE PSYCHOLOGY MAJOR'S HANDBOOK

What can you expect from this book? So far, we discussed the nature of college and briefly introduced psychology, including its fields of study and academic degrees. Your first step in choosing a major and preparing for a career is to get to know yourself. Chapter 2 will introduce you to new ways of understanding yourself that will help you choose a major, as well as what psychology majors learn. Chapter 3 examines career opportunities for psychology majors.

A major theme of this book is that you play a major role in determining your success in college and beyond. Chapter 4 will show you how to take an active role in your education and shape your own future. Chapter 5 offers an introduction to self-management, a set of cognitive and organizational skills that are helpful for all students. Regardless of your major, you'll need to learn how to study and how to write papers. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 will introduce you to study tips as well as specific information about how to write college papers—and specifically, psychology papers.

The remaining chapters of this book encourage you to look ahead. In Chapter 9, we discuss how to search for a job with a bachelor's degree in psychology. In Chapter 10, you'll learn what careers are available with a graduate degree in psychology, and Chapter 11 provides an overview of how to apply to graduate school. The college years offer opportunities and challenges. *The Psychology Major's Handbook* will help you navigate these years and keep the big picture—your future—in mind.

REFLECTION PROMPTS

Transition to College

What aspects of the college transition feel most exciting or challenging? How do your personal background and life circumstances shape your approach to college? What strengths do you bring, and what support might you need?

The Personal Side of College

How do you think attending college might shape your personal values, beliefs, and behaviors? How might college impact your existing relationships and help you build new ones?

Future Me

Write a letter to your future self, reflecting on your current thoughts, feelings, and expectations about college. What hopes and goals do you have for your college experience? In what ways do you think a college degree will influence your life in the coming years and decades?

Myths about Psychology

What do you think are the most common misconceptions about psychology? Why? Did you have any misconceptions? Why do you think there are so many myths about this field? What can be done to reduce these misconceptions?

Do not copy, post, or distribute