# 2 MAJORING IN PSYCHOLOGY AND PREPARING FOR YOUR CAREER


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Psychology is consistently one of the top undergraduate majors. Why? Most people would like to understand human behavior and what makes people tick. As discussed in Chapter 1, the psychology major offers opportunities to develop a range of marketable skills that transfer to work settings. However, a bachelor's degree itself will not distinguish you from the other 127,000 new psychology baccalaureates this year. What will you do to stand out from other qualified applicants? In this chapter, we take a closer look at the psychology major and how to steer your education and obtain research and applied experiences to prepare you for your career after college.

## THE PSYCHOLOGY CURRICULUM

So what can you specifically expect as a psychology major? All college majors involve taking three types of courses: general education, elective, and major courses. General education requirements include a broad range of courses covering many subjects essential to becoming a well-rounded and capable thinker. Elective courses are those that students "elect" or choose based on their interests. Many students use their elective credits to earn a minor or to round out their skill set by completing courses in management, finance, statistics, or other sought-after skills. The college major consists of a series of courses within a specific discipline, enabling students to develop specialty knowledge in a given field. The specific requirements for a psychology major will vary by department and institution, but most psychology departments model their curricula on the American Psychological Association Goals for Psychology Education (American Psychological Association, 2023).

### American Psychological Association Goals for Psychology Education

The American Psychological Association (American Psychological Association, 2023) has outlined five broad goals for psychology education:

Goal 1: Content Knowledge and Application
- **1.1** Describe key concepts, principles, and theories in psychology
- **1.2** Develop a working knowledge of psychology's major subfields
- **1.3** Represent significant aspects of the history of psychology
- **1.4** Apply psychological content to solve practical problems
- **1.5** Relate examples of psychology's integrative themes

Goal 2: Scientific Inquiry and Critical Thinking
- **2.1** Exercise reasoning to investigate psychological phenomena
- **2.2** Interpret, design, and evaluate basic psychological research
- **2.3** Incorporate sociocultural factors in scientific research practices
- **2.4** Use statistics to evaluate quantitative research findings

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Goal 3: Values in Psychological Science
- **3.1** Employ ethical standards in research, practice, and academic contexts
- **3.2** Develop and practice interpersonal and intercultural responsiveness
- **3.3** Apply psychological principles to strengthen community and improve quality of life

Goal 4: Communication, Psychological Literacy, and Technology Skills
- **4.1** Interact effectively with others
- **4.2** Write and present effectively for different purposes
- **4.3** Provide evidence of psychological information literacy
- **4.4** Exhibit appropriate technological skills to improve communication

Goal 5: Personal and Professional Development
- **5.1** Exhibit effective self-regulation
- **5.2** Refine project management skills
- **5.3** Display effective judgment in professional interactions
- **5.4** Cultivate workforce collaboration skills
- **5.5** Demonstrate appropriate workforce technological skills
- **5.6** Develop direction for life after graduation

Do you notice a correspondence among the APA Goals for Psychology Education and, from Chapter 1, the characteristics of psychological literacy and the transferrable skills developed with a psychology major? Many psychology departments structure their programs based on the APA Goals, aiming to promote psychological literacy.

## Psychology Coursework

As a psychology major, you can expect to take several types of classes. The specific major requirements may vary by university, but most require the following:

### Introductory Psychology/General Psychology

Your first course in psychology offers a whirlwind, fast-paced tour of the field, including all of the subdisciplines discussed in Chapter 1.

### Psychology Methodology and Psychological Statistics

The methodology courses will teach you how psychologists learn about human behavior. Students learn the research methods psychologists use to ask and answer questions about behavior. They also learn statistics and the methods psychologists use to compile and draw conclusions from the information that they collect. Finally, students gain experience in designing and carrying out research studies that give them practice in asking and answering questions about human behavior.

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### Psychology Breadth Courses

Just as the general education curriculum is designed to provide students with a broad knowledge base for a well-rounded education, the psychology breadth requirement imparts psychology majors with a well-rounded education in human behavior. The specific requirements vary across psychology departments, but all will include courses in the clinical, developmental, cognitive, biological, and social/personality subfields. Typical courses offered by psychology departments are listed in Table 2.1.

**TABLE 2.1 ■ Psychology Courses**

These courses may be grouped and organized in several ways. Some of these courses are required for majors at nearly all schools, while others are electives at a handful of schools.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Abnormal Psychology/ Psychopathology | Family Psychology | Psychology of Creativity |
| Adolescent Psychology | Group Dynamics | Psychology of Gender |
| Adulthood and Aging | Health Psychology | Psychology of Learning |
| Applied Psychology | History of Psychology | Psychology of Motivation |
| Behavior Modification | History, Methods, and Statistics | Psychology of Personality |
| Biological and Neuropsychology | Industrial Psychology | Psychology of Women |
| Child Psychology | Life-Span Development | Psychopharmacology |
| Clinical Psychology | Organizational Psychology | Research Methods |
| Cognitive Neuroscience | Personality, Social Processes, and Measurement | School Psychology |
| Cognitive Psychology | Physiological Psychology | Sensation and Perception |
| Consumer Psychology | Psychological and Educational Testing | Social Psychology |
| Cross-Cultural Psychology | Psychological Statistics | Sport Psychology |
| Developmental | Psychology and Law | |
| Developmental Psychopathology | Psychology of Adjustment | |
| Educational Psychology | | |
| Experimental Psychology | | |

### Psychology Elective Courses

You can expect to take several elective courses in your major. These are psychology courses that are not required but are your choice. These courses are opportunities to explore your interests or gain knowledge and skills that you think will be helpful in the future.

### Psychology Capstone Course

The capstone course is intended as the crowning achievement for majors, representing the culmination of their learning journey. This advanced course requires students to synthesize and demonstrate mastery of the material. Students demonstrate how to study psychological phenomena, including how to formulate research questions, devise methods to address research questions, and draw meaningful conclusions.

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The specific requirements of the capstone course vary by university or program. It might include an independent research study, writing a lengthy review paper or senior thesis, or another culminating assignment. Reach out to your professors to learn more about the capstone course. Seek advice to help you plan ahead and choose the courses and activities that will best prepare you for this experience.

## GET TO KNOW PROFESSORS

Most students complete the basic steps needed to earn a degree. They attend class, take notes, and learn the content of their discipline, but their learning is often limited to the classroom and their coursework. However, learning occurs in many places outside of the classroom—and it's these out-of-class experiences that are often the most enriching. Many students don't take advantage of their school's most valuable resource: the faculty. Perhaps one of the most essential pieces of advice in this book is to get to know your professors. Establish relationships with faculty.

Professors can help your professional development through various learning experiences outside the classroom. Informal conversations are opportunities to learn about the field and learn about a professor's experiences. Relationships with faculty provide mentorship opportunities. A mentor is someone with expertise who takes a particular interest in you; they may be a college professor, advisor, job, research, or practicum supervisor. Mentors provide their protégés with opportunities to learn, be advised, and obtain moral support. They are often a source of research experience.

Professors involve students in their research, providing opportunities to assist them in making discoveries and generating new knowledge. They help their students obtain applied experiences such as internships, summer positions, and teaching assistantships. Faculty aid students' professional development in other ways, such as by introducing students to others who can help them meet their goals, including former students, colleagues at other schools, and potential employers.

In addition, job and graduate school applications require references. These go beyond the information that can be gleaned from transcripts. References discuss students' abilities and aptitudes from academic, motivational, and personal perspectives. Of course, persuasive job and grad school recommendations should not be your only reason for developing relationships with faculty members, but helpful references are a valuable motivator and reward.

How do you get to know professors? Talk to them after class. Stop by during office hours. What do you talk about? Psychology. Ask questions about material—theories, research, cases—discussed in class. Professors are people too—and they were once students like you. Ask about their experiences as students, how they decided to go to graduate school, and what led them to their research interests. Share an interesting website about the brain, for example, or tell the professor about a relevant program you viewed. The goal is to learn from these conversations and show interest in the subject.

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All relationships are two-way streets, and relationships with faculty are no different. Who do *you* like to interact with? Most people, professors included, prefer to interact with others who are respectful, attentive, kind, curious, and genuine. Smile and be friendly; you'll be surprised at how easy it is to get to know the faculty.

## RESEARCH EXPERIENCE IN PSYCHOLOGY

One benefit of getting to know faculty is you may learn about opportunities to gain research experience. One of the most valuable sources of research experience is assisting faculty with their research.

### Research Assistant

Professors, especially those at undergraduate institutions without graduate programs, often depend on undergraduates to further their research programs and complete studies that they don't have time to conduct independently. Motivated students can help them to carry out these studies. Involving undergraduates in research also allows faculty to develop relationships with students and witness their professional growth. Successful mentoring relationships, such as those with competent research assistants, are rewarding.

The benefits of being a research assistant include the thrill of discovery, obtaining specialized skills, obtaining experiences that will enhance applications to jobs and graduate programs, developing a mentoring relationship with a faculty member, and acquiring helpful letters of recommendation for employment and graduate school (see Chapter 15).

What can you expect to do as a research assistant? The tasks will vary by professor, project, and area of psychology. Some might be involved in data collection by administering surveys or maintaining and operating lab equipment. Others might code and enter data, make photocopies, or write literature reviews. Research assistants conduct library research, including performing literature searches using databases (e.g., PsycINFO and PsycARTICLES) and obtaining and summarizing articles. Students may also assist in preparing submissions to conferences and, if accepted, work on poster or oral presentations for professional conferences—and in some cases may assist in preparing a manuscript to submit the results of their collaborative research to a scientific journal.

Students who work with faculty members as research assistants often develop their own ideas for research projects that stem from the faculty's work. For example, one of my students worked with me on several related projects and developed her own hypothesis to extend my work by adding additional variables. She carried out her project under my supervision as her senior thesis, presented it at a regional psychology conference, and together, we published it in a scholarly journal with the student listed as the first

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author. Research assistantships provide substantial educational and professional development opportunities.

If you are interested in assisting a faculty member with their research, first and foremost, you should perform well in class. Seek opportunities to approach professors but do not send out a mass or form email notifying them of your availability. Instead, approach professors during their office hours and ask for leads on who might be looking for research assistants. Explain that you hope to get involved in research and ask questions about their work (read about it first). When you find a professor looking for an assistant, describe what you can offer (computer skills, internet skills, statistical skills) and the number of hours you're available per week. Ask questions about the professor's expectations and how you will be evaluated. Professors are not always clear in describing their expectations for students and the products of the collaboration (such as a paper).

In most cases, no pay is involved in assisting professors with their research. Instead, you'll get a free learning experience that will improve your skills and abilities and make you more appealing to graduate schools and employers. Sometimes you may earn course credit for your work. Finally, volunteer to work closely with a professor only if you have the time to commit. Remember that falling behind or dropping out will reflect negatively on you—much more so than if you hadn't become involved at all.

## Independent Research: Independent, Capstone, and Honor's Research

Another way to obtain research experience is to carve out your own opportunity by conducting your own study, under a professor's supervision. Students who assist faculty in research often develop their own research ideas and hypotheses that stem from the professor's work. Others formulate ideas on their own or as class projects. As you're aware, research generates new knowledge. When we engage in research, we make discoveries and learn new things. Sure, you read about psychology research and may have assisted faculty with their research, but carrying out your own study to examine your own hypothesis is a very different experience that will help you learn more than you have in any class.

The specific opportunities for psychology students to conduct independent research vary by institution. They take several forms: theses, capstone research, honor's theses, and independent studies. Some psychology departments require students to carry out research projects to demonstrate their competence; these studies often take place in capstone courses that involve integrating and demonstrating the skills obtained over the college years. These courses often take the form of conducting a research study from start to finish. In some departments, these studies are called theses, and for students enrolled in honors programs, *honors theses*. Many psychology departments also offer the opportunity for students to conduct a student-developed *independent study* for course credit. Although student-developed studies are often called independent

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research, the work is far from the isolated experience the name conveys. All are closely supervised by faculty.

If you are interested in developing and conducting your own study, take the steps described to find a faculty member whose interests match yours and who is willing to oversee your study. Together you will determine your research question and how to address it. Students' ideas for independent studies frequently come from their work on faculty projects. It is often said that research generates more questions than answers. These are often the best studies to conduct, as they already have a faculty member's attention and interest. However, you may also consider approaching faculty with whom you have not conducted research. The specific steps in designing and conducting your research study will be determined by the topic and your interactions with your faculty supervisor.

It takes effort, but students who obtain research experience tend to have more positive views of their skills, the usefulness of their degree, and higher satisfaction with their education decades later (Budesheim et al., 2021). Some of the most profound college experiences occur outside of the classroom.

## INTERNSHIP AND FIELD EXPERIENCES FOR PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS

Employers value hands-on experience. An internship or other field experience gives students the chance to practice skills and learn about applied settings. An internship provides hands-on experience in a work setting for a specific period (typically a summer, semester, or year). Internships also vary by field and employer. Some internships are paid and some are not. Some internships are organized through the psychology department, and others through the college career center or cooperative education office. Sometimes, students get internships by contacting local businesses and social service agencies. Often students earn course credit for completing an internship. Ideally, internships are supervised by a faculty member as well as by an on-site supervisor.

### What Is an Internship?

Internships vary dramatically, so predicting any student's experience is difficult. Some internships will be exciting and others less so. Virtually all internships will entail some tasks that are repetitive or dull, such as filing, answering phones, or entering data. However, that is the nature of most entry-level positions. Examples of internship settings include social service agencies (where you might observe or assist in the intake of clients, psychological testing, report writing, and behavior modification) and human resource departments (where you might observe and assist in administering structured interviews, writing performance appraisals, and coordinating special projects or programs). The best internship opportunities provide experiences that are similar to entry-level jobs.

The most obvious benefit of an internship is that you'll learn and practice skills relevant to everyday work settings, such as professional communication styles. Many

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students are surprised and gratified by the recognition that they already have valuable skills that employers desire. Internship experiences can hone these skills and help you learn new ones. As an intern, you have a chance to get an idea of what it is like to work in a particular setting and sample professional roles. You'll learn about a specific job, duties, and support, the types of colleagues and clientele or customers you might encounter, and what you can expect regarding responsibilities and resources. Moreover, internships offer opportunities for personal development, such as adapting to new settings, circumstances, and people. You may learn new skills and hone others, and you may come to recognize that you have skills to contribute to practical settings and skills that you must develop.

Perhaps the most valuable lesson that accompanies an internship experience is that you'll learn about your own interests, likes, and dislikes. Your internship experiences may confirm your interest in a given career. But sometimes an internship tells you about what you don't want to do. It is not uncommon for students to believe that clinical or counseling psychology is for them until they gain some experience and realize that it's not a good fit. Therefore, a vital reason for seeking field experience is to become more confident of your career choice. There is no "unsuccessful" internship because learning about yourself—your interests, skills, and disinterests—prepares you to seek job opportunities that are right for you. Working in the field helps you to identify what work-related outcomes you value (e.g., pay, autonomy, responsibility) and what interests and abilities you need to be satisfied in that work. It is a job tryout. You'll learn about a particular job environment, duties, and support.

Internships offer practical benefits, such as gaining a realistic understanding of work environments, developing professional contacts, and enhancing your résumé. Interns get formal and informal job sources and contacts, are evaluated positively by job recruiters, earn higher salaries, and are more likely to have a job lined up before graduating (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2018). In annual surveys, employers consistently rate internships and job-related experiences as very desirable for candidates (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2018). Most importantly, students who work as interns are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs after graduation and even years later (Budesheim et al., 2021). They also remain in their jobs longer than the students who do not obtain field experience.

Finally, graduate school admissions committees, especially in applied subfields of psychology, such as clinical, counseling, or school psychology, look favorably on field experience because it indicates a student's interest, motivation, and competence in applied settings.

## How to Find an Internship

Some internships and field or applied experiences are tied to courses. For example, a course in community psychology might place students in the field for several hours each week in addition to meeting as a class. Other classes might use the term *service*

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*learning*, where students engage in volunteer work, providing a service in a psychology-related setting. These projects might take place over a few weeks or the entire semester. For example, I (TK) spent several hours helping a developmentally disabled child and their family as a project for a developmental psychology course I took as an undergraduate student decades ago (well before the term *service learning* came into use). I learned a great deal about development, but more importantly, I provided a service to a family in need—and I learned about myself.

Internships and other field experiences vary by department and college. Many departments have a faculty member who serves as a coordinator for field experience and internship programs. They ensure that internship sites are appropriate, develop working relationships with them, and evaluate student performance. Other departments may not have one coordinator; in some cases, different faculty are responsible for each internship site, depending on their relationship with the site. Some colleges have an office that specializes in placing students in internships. Sometimes these offices and opportunities are referred to as *cooperative education*. Typically these centers offer workshops or job expos in which employers visit the campus. Check with your advisor, another professor, or the career or cooperative education center at your institution.

Some departments offer an internship course in which students are matched with applied settings and earn credit for their work. Students who wish to enroll in the internship course typically must apply well ahead of registration. In addition to course and GPA requirements, these applications often include essays, interviews with faculty, and sometimes placements. These interviews can help place students into appropriate internship sites. They also demonstrate whether students are mature and have the professional skills for the applied experience. Professionalism is vital to earning an internship.

Sometimes students are asked to find their own field experience site. If you are in this position, begin at least 2 to 3 months early, as it takes time to locate a site, make contact and meet with the director, obtain a faculty supervisor, and get permission to proceed. Discuss possible sites with the professor who will oversee your work. Contact agencies and employers, offering to volunteer as a learning experience and for course credit. For example, you might look up the social service agencies in your area, such as women's centers, shelters, and not-for-profit agencies that help individuals and families. Email the director and explain that you are a student looking to volunteer and perhaps get course credit for your work. Attach a résumé (see Chapter 13). Anticipate interviewing with the agency staff. Be prepared to have your professor speak with the agency, vouching for you and taking responsibility for providing academic supervision.

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

There are many ways to get the hands-on experience coveted by employers and graduate schools. Like research assistants who help professors conduct their research, teaching assistants support professors' work in and out of the classroom. Less common than research assistantships, teaching assistantships offer opportunities to learn various

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skills. Many professors, myself included, have observed that they develop a new, more complex understanding of a topic by teaching it to students. Explaining material to another person helps you identify gaps in your knowledge and prompts learning.

What do undergraduate teaching assistants do? They assist a professor with a specific course, such as General Psychology, for at least a semester. They may help an instructor plan discussion questions or in-class group assignments, run discussion or laboratory sessions, and serve as class assistants. More specifically, a teaching assistant might do any of the following, depending on the instructor and institution:

- Attend lectures
- Conduct review sessions for exams
- Facilitate discussions
- Prepare lectures
- Request or acquire necessary equipment
- Hold regular office hours
- Tutor students
- Manage and respond to course-related e-mail
- Update course webpages
- Participate in online discussions
- Proctor exams
- Maintain course attendance records
- Act as a liaison/mediator between students and professors

Not every department and college offers teaching assistantships. Some departments have formal programs with application procedures that entail completing forms, submitting a statement of intent, and soliciting recommendation letters. Others have no formal program, but students informally assist faculty as volunteers or earn course credit. In some cases, for example, a student might earn course credit for working as a teaching assistant and completing an academic project, such as a paper examining their experiences.

Ask your professors if teaching assistant opportunities exist. Ask even if no one you know has worked as a teaching assistant. Sometimes opportunities exist, but they are largely unadvertised. Ask and you may be pleasantly surprised. At any rate, asking never hurts and will only make you appear motivated and eager to learn and gain experience.

If your department does not offer teaching assistantships, consider getting some teaching experience by tutoring other students. Check whether your department has

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tutoring facilities or a tutoring program. If not, check with the study skills and student services centers to locate your university's tutoring program. Tutoring is an opportunity to learn, to help others, and to determine if further study in psychology is for you. Students who engage in peer learning tend to show gains in content knowledge, academic success, and career readiness (Riser et al., 2021). Couple tutoring with research and applied opportunities to round out your experience.

## DELVE DEEPER INTO PSYCHOLOGY OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

Research, teaching, and fieldwork are important educational opportunities, but there are many other ways to learn and advance your skills. Show your interest in psychology and open up new avenues for learning by seeking chances to get involved in the field.

### Attend Psychology Conferences

Conferences are good places to see what psychology research is all about. Professional organizations such as the American Psychological Association (APA; http://apa.org) and the Association for Psychological Science (APS; http://psychologicalscience.org) hold annual meetings in various cities around the United States. Psychologists from all types of settings attend to share and learn about the latest research and socialize. National conferences attract thousands of people. National conferences usually take place at hotels in cities near airports so that attendees can easily arrive and leave and have a place to stay, as many conferences last several days.

Regional psychology associations also hold annual conferences, some of which might be within driving distance of you. These conferences are smaller, with a few hundred people, depending on the conference. Although it may seem counterintuitive, fewer attendees means you have more opportunities to make contacts because you're likely to see the same faces throughout the conference. A list of regional psychology associations is provided in Table 2.2.

**TABLE 2.2 ■ Regional Psychological Associations**

- Eastern Psychological Association (EPA): http://www.easternpsychological.org
- Southeastern Psychological Association (SEPA): http://www.sepaonline.com
- Southwestern Psychological Association (SWPA): http://www.swpsych.org
- Rocky Mountain Psychological Association (RMPA): http://www.rockymountainpsych.com
- Western Psychological Association (WPA): http://westernpsych.org/
- Midwestern Psychological Association (MPA): http://www.midwesternpsych.org/
- New England Psychological Association (NEPA): http://www.nepsychological.org/

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What can you expect to do at a conference? You'll listen to presentations by researchers discussing their latest work, usually work that has not yet been published. You'll also view poster sessions. Posters are another format for presenting research, in which the study's purpose, methods, results, and discussion are presented on poster board. The study's author stands by to answer questions and talk informally about the work. Poster presentations are an excellent opportunity to meet students and faculty who share your interests. Most conferences also have practical presentations for students and early career professionals on topics such as getting into graduate school, publishing, and teaching.

Networking is one of the most important reasons to attend a conference. You'll come into contact with student researchers, possible advisors, and possible employers. If you are interested in graduate school, you may have the chance to talk to current students in programs you're considering and to possibly meet faculty with whom you'd like to work. Many students find attending their first conference an eye-opening experience because it's a glimpse into the world of research psychology and academia. Distinguished researchers you've studied become real people, lecturing about their latest work right before you.

If you are interested in attending a conference, speak with students and faculty involved in the department club or Psi Chi (which we will discuss later). Many departments organize informal trips to conferences. If your department is not sponsoring an informal trip, seek another interested student or two and consider attending together.

## Disseminate Research

Suppose you conduct research with a faculty member and the results of the research project turn out favorably. In that case, the next step in the project is to disseminate the results and tell the scholarly community about your findings. Most students obtain their first experiences with research dissemination through presentations at local or regional professional conferences. Presenting research results at a conference is a valuable learning opportunity and an impressive addition to a résumé.

Typically, conference presentations take two forms—papers and posters. A paper is a 10- to 15-minute presentation made to an audience in which you describe your research concisely, with the aid of handouts, overheads, or slides. Posters are a more common format for student presentations. A poster presents your research concisely on a 3- by 5-foot or 4- by 6-foot freestanding bulletin board. All posters are displayed in a large room (usually 1.5 to 2 hours), and the audience wanders through, browsing posters of interest. A poster presentation offers lots of one-on-one interaction, as audience members stop at posters of interest to them and ask questions about the project.

If the research that you are conducting with a faculty member turns out especially favorably, you might prepare the results for submission to a scholarly journal. If you decide to submit to a journal, recognize that it will take a great deal of effort and usually more time than anticipated. Expect multiple rounds of edits, careful proofreading,

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and precise formatting. Once the paper is submitted, there will be a long wait (typically several months) to hear from the publisher. After a long wait, you'll receive a letter from the editor, typically accompanied by two or more evaluations by peer reviewers. These reviews evaluate the paper's scientific merit, including its rationale and fit with preexisting research, methodology and data, analyses, and conclusions.

Not every paper submitted to a journal is published. The best outcome that most submissions receive is a "revise and resubmit" or an invitation to revise the paper in light of the reviews and resubmit it. Occasionally a paper is accepted outright, but it is usually under the condition that further revisions be made. Despite these cautions, the rewards of publishing are great, a major achievement that employers and graduate schools look upon favorably.

While professional journals in psychology abound, a handful of journals specialize in publishing undergraduates' work. The most prestigious undergraduate journal is the *Psi Chi Journal of Psychological Research*, sponsored by Psi Chi and published quarterly. Submissions to the *Psi Chi Journal of Psychological Research* are reviewed by three psychology professionals. Other undergraduate journals in psychology are listed in Table 2.3.

**TABLE 2.3 ■ Undergraduate Psychology Journals**

| Journal Title | Website |
|---|---|
| *Journal of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences* | http://view2.fdu.edu/academics/becton-college/psychology-and-counseling/jpbs/ |
| *Journal of Young Investigators* | http://www.jyi.org |
| *Modern Psychological Studies* | https://scholar.utc.edu/mps/ |
| *Psi Chi Journal of Psychological Research* | https://www.psichi.org/page/journal_main |
| *University of California Los Angeles Undergraduate Research Journal of Psychology* | https://urjp.psych.ucla.edu/ |
| *Undergraduate Journal of Psychology at Berkley* | https://ujpb.org/ |
| *Yale Review of Undergraduate Research in Psychology* | http://www.yale.edu/yrurp/ |

However, research experiences do not always result in submissions to scholarly journals. Students can gain some publishing experience through respectable nonrefereed outlets. Newsletters published by psychology departments, student organizations, and other groups on campus offer opportunities to write about topics related to psychology. Professional organizations such as APA, APS, and regional psychological associations (such as EPA, NEPA, and WPA) have student publications or member

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publications open to student writers. Finally, Psi Chi and Psi Beta offer opportunities for students to contribute to their newsletter magazines. These publications cannot substitute for published articles in peer-reviewed journals. Still, they can help you demonstrate your initiative, writing ability, and interest in psychology—all of which are valued by employers and graduate admissions committees.

## Honor Societies and Professional Organizations

One of the most straightforward, most effective, yet underappreciated ways of forming an identity as a lifelong student of psychology is to get involved in professional organizations, on and off campus (Exercise 4.6). Get involved and promote a campus culture oriented toward psychology by joining (or starting) a psychology club. Most psychology clubs are open to anyone interested in psychology, regardless of major. Don't forget to pay attention to what's happening in your department. Departments often invite guest speakers to campus and faculty members give presentations on their research interests. Attend these activities to support the department's efforts, learn about psychology, and demonstrate your interest and commitment.

Likely the most visible resource for psychology students on your campus is Psi Chi, the National Honor Society in Psychology. Psi Chi is a psychology organization for students. Founded in 1929, its purpose is to encourage, stimulate, and maintain excellence in scholarship and to advance psychology as a science. Students enrolled at institutions that have a chapter must meet minimum qualifications and apply for membership to Psi Chi. Students at community colleges are eligible to apply to Psi Beta, Psi Chi's sister organization.

Get involved in your institution's chapter of Psi Chi or Psi Beta and you'll have the opportunity to get to know other psychology students, develop leadership skills, and organize campus activities. The psychology club and Psi Chi frequently work together to organize psychology-related activities for students.

Psi Chi also offers opportunities for students at the regional and national levels. Psi Chi sponsors sessions at regional and national conferences that promote student research, including opportunities to present research and get to know psychology students (and professors) from other colleges. Psi Chi offers programming relevant to psychology students at these conferences, such as presentations on careers in psychology and how to apply to graduate school. Another important benefit of joining Psi Chi is the quarterly magazine, *Eye on Psi Chi*. Each issue includes articles on psychology and practical advice on pursuing a career in psychology. As discussed, the *Psi Chi Journal of Psychological Research*, published by Psi Chi, is a national peer-reviewed scholarly journal that is dedicated to research conducted by undergraduate students. Because there are so many benefits to becoming a member of Psi Chi, if your institution does not have a chapter, discuss the possibility of starting a chapter with a faculty member.

Finally, the American Psychological Association and the Association for Psychological Science offer resources that are helpful to students. Both associations

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provide advice on entering the field of psychology and obtaining student affiliate memberships that permit you to join for a reduced fee and offer discounts on psychology journals and books. As discussed earlier, APA and APS sponsor annual conferences where thousands of psychologist researchers and practitioners gather to learn about the latest research, attend workshops, and network. Attend either of these conferences or any of the meetings sponsored by regional psychological associations for an amazing learning opportunity.

## ROUND OUT YOUR EDUCATION

You are more than your major. Your college major indicates your specialty, but much of what you learn in college will come from experiences outside your major. Seek opportunities to learn about yourself and career paths and recognize that opportunities often arise unexpectedly. We often don't know when we will encounter an opportunity to learn about ourselves or our futures. Instead, successful students attempt to remain open to new perspectives and opportunities.

### Participate in Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activities like clubs, teams, and out-of-class activities can help you develop useful teamwork and leadership skills and enhance your marketability. Similar to internships and work experience, extracurricular activities can allow you to test career paths, develop contacts, and improve your communication and interpersonal skills. In addition, employers value volunteer work for campus and community organizations because it shows that you're a good citizen.

Take advantage of the extracurricular activities available at your institution. Extracurricular participation shows employers your leadership skills, ability to work effectively in a group, and initiative and motivation.

### Take Classes or a Minor in Another Discipline

Take a range of classes. You'll fulfill your college's general education requirements and learn about areas you might want to major in. If you find a class interesting, take another in that discipline.

After considering where you'd like to be (i.e., your ultimate career goal), take a few elective courses outside of psychology that are specific to your goals. For example, if you plan to enter the business world, a course in management or accounting certainly wouldn't hurt. If you want a job in human services, take classes in social work, communication, criminal justice, sociology, or anthropology. Regardless of your career plans, classes and experiences that enhance your communication skills (e.g., courses in writing, speech, and communications; writing for the campus newspaper) are a good investment because employers favor communication skills.

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Consider learning a language. For example, the ability to speak Spanish is helpful in all settings. Once you know what you'd like to do, consider adding a minor or even a double major to your curriculum to enhance your experience and skill set. For example, students interested in human resource careers might consider a business minor while those interested in law enforcement might consider a minor in justice and law administration. One survey of graduates with bachelor's degrees in psychology found that the happiest and most successful graduates took coursework in a field related to their career—especially a minor or double major (Landrum, 2009). However, weigh the costs and benefits of a double major or minor given your situation. If it delays your graduation, can you afford the additional time and money to complete a double major?

## Get Work Experience

Employment is another source of applied experience. Psychology students often work in childcare, office, and retail settings. There is something to learn in every setting, but the students who benefit the most from employment are those who are aware of the skills they are developing and seek additional learning opportunities.

Most institutions offer on-campus work-study opportunities where students are employed on campus for a set number of hours each week. The positions vary and students may be placed in any setting on campus. Working as an administrative assistant in an academic department or administrator's office can allow you to learn what's entailed in managing an office. Working in a high-traffic setting, such as the registrar's or cashier's office or the library, can put you in contact with many people—students, faculty, and administrators—and offer opportunities to practice and improve communication and interpersonal skills. Working as a tutor can help you to broaden your understanding of your field and learn how to teach and motivate others. Colleges with residential programs often offer students the opportunity to serve as a resident assistant (RA), a peer leader who supervises and supports students living in an on-campus residence or dormitory. RAs are often students' first stop for seeking help with various issues, such as resolving conflicts with peers and adjusting to college. They plan programs, disseminate information to students, and monitor facilities. RAs develop skills in communication and interpersonal relations, planning and decision-making, and leadership.

Throughout this chapter, we have examined ways in which you can steer your education, assert your autonomy, make decisions, and obtain experiences to develop skills not just for success in college but in your career. Actively participating in your education and career development involves doing more than the minimum expected work of college, more than attending class and earning good grades. All the opportunities we have discussed, including research and teaching assistantships, internships and field experiences, and participating in clubs, professional organizations, and conferences, rely on establishing relationships with professors and peers. These require time and effort outside of class, but the rewards are immense.

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# EXERCISE 2.1

## DEVELOPING SKILLS AND ACQUIRING EXPERIENCES

Over the college years, your goal is to develop transferrable skills, obtain real-world experiences, and establish ongoing relationships with faculty. This exercise encourages you to consider these tasks.

### Skill Development

Consider how psychology majors can develop the following competencies desired by employers. For each competency, identify at least two psychology courses, two courses from other departments, and at least one out-of-class experience that can aid its development.

1. Interpersonal and teamwork skills
2. Thinking and problem-solving skills
3. Written communication skills
4. Data analysis skills
5. Computer literacy
6. Self-management and adaptability

### Relationships With Faculty

Learn about the faculty in your department. Visit the Psychology Department website and review faculty biographies. Visit their websites. Review their lists of publications.

1. Choose two or three faculty to study in more depth. Who are they and why did you choose them?
2. Next, choose one professor. Review their research. Look up the abstracts of articles that sound interesting. Write a two-sentence summary of their area of expertise and research. Do you find it interesting? Why or why not?
3. If you're interested in their work, read more and devise three questions to ask about their work. List them.
4. Visit the professor's office hours to discuss their research. What did you learn?
5. Consider your overall impressions: How comfortable do you feel speaking with this faculty member? If you're uncomfortable, try to identify why.
6. Complete this process for each faculty member, and you'll get ideas about which faculty you're more inclined to work with. Discuss the results of this exploration.

### Applied Experiences

Identify specific opportunities for outside-of-class experience, through internships, work experience, or volunteer work. The psychology department course catalog and website, your advisor, and the career services office at your school are valuable sources for completing this task.

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1. Describe the opportunity.
2. Who do you contact to learn more?
3. When should you obtain this experience? How far ahead must you plan?
4. How will this experience enhance your education? What will you learn? What skills will you gain? What are the outcomes of this experience?

## SUGGESTED READINGS

Copeland, D. E., & Houska, J. A. (2020). *Success as a psychology major*. Sage.

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

Kuther, T. L. (2025). *The psychology major's handbook* (6th ed.). Sage.

Silivia, P. J., Delaney, P. F., & Marchovitch, S. (2017). *What psychology majors could (and should) be doing: An informal guide to research experience and professional skills*. APA.

## SUGGESTED VIDEOS

*How to get the most out of studying: Part 1 of 5, "Beliefs that make you fail . . . or succeed"*
https://youtu.be/RH95h36NChI?si=M88fVkoL-PVrzqkv

In this 5-part series. cognitive psychologist Dr Stephen Chew presents science-based advice on studying and learning.

*How a student changed her study habits by setting goals and managing time*
https://youtu.be/z7e7gtU3PHY?si=Twf1So1BAFqekjij

In this popular TED talk, student Yana Savitsky reveals her most powerful study and time management tool: the pomodoro method.

## RESOURCES

APA "Psychology student network"
http://www.apa.org/ed/precollege/psn

*Eye on Psi Chi*
https://www.psichi.org

American Psychological Association
http://www.apa.org

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American Psychological Society
http://www.psychologicalscience.org

APS *Observer* "Student notebook"
https://www.psychologicalscience.org/members/apssc/observer_student_notebook

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