

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT - PSYCHOLOGY CONCENTRATION - FOR STUDENTS MATRICULATED BEFORE DEC. 1, 2013

Spring 2002 - Area of Study Guidelines: Human Development

Advice for Students Developing Concentrations in Psychology

Provided that they conform to the area of study guidelines, many concentrations related to children, adolescents, adults and families may fit well within the human development area of study. Psychology, however, is the only disciplinary concentration in human development, and, as such, studies in this concentration should be selected to meet the general expectations in the field.

In recent years, the field of psychology has changed and expanded so that psychology departments are increasingly diverse in their offerings. Thus, it is no longer feasible to provide students with a single comprehensive plan of studies that "covers" the field. Instead, when developing their programs, students and their mentors should consider the possibility of either emphasizing a particular focus or direction or designing a general plan of study in psychology that provides a basis for graduate school or some other specific goal. This section is designed to provide some assistance in that planning process.

Human Development Website

The Empire State College website contains much information for students who are in the process of designing their degree programs. The human development site has relatively current information that also may be relevant to students concentrating in psychology. We suggest that students visit this site as they begin their investigations, and make use of the Internet in seeking out additional information.

The American Psychological Association

The best source of current information about psychology, however, will come from the American Psychological Association. We strongly recommend that all students concentrating in psychology become student members of this organization. Applications are available from human development mentors, or by contacting:

American Psychology Association
Membership Office, 750 First Street NE
Washington, DC 20002-4242
202-336-5500 or 800-374-2721 (ext. 5580 for membership)
www.apa.org

Membership in this organization includes two publications: The APA Monitor, an easily accessible monthly magazine with current news about research, education, policy, legal issues, and jobs; and The American Psychologist, a monthly journal with scholarly articles of general interest to all professional psychologists, often with a focus on application.

The APA also publishes a large number of other journals and books, which are available to members at a discount. Of particular interest

to undergraduates are the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA) and Is Psychology the Major for You?: Planning for Your Undergraduate Years (Woods and Wilkinson (Eds.))

The first book, an important reference for every student who concentrates in psychology, describes how to write a research article, defines the APA writing style and provides details about how to cite and list any and all kinds of references. The second book presents an overview of the discipline, describes the kinds of critical skills psychology students can acquire and offers a description of a variety of careers open to psychology students. While most students might want to purchase The Publication Manual, the second book can probably be borrowed from a library (or possibly a human development mentor).

The Undergraduate Concentration in Psychology

There are three major sources of information about how undergraduate degree programs in psychology might be constructed.

1. First, recent articles published in The American Psychologist will bring students up to date on the kind of curriculum professional psychologists believe best serve the undergraduate student. To date, three such articles are relevant and useful:

Benjamin, L.T. (2001). American psychology's struggles with its curriculum: Should a thousand flowers bloom? American Psychologist, 56, 735-742.

Brewer, C.L. (1997). Undergraduate education in psychology: Will the mermaids sing? American Psychologist, 52, 434-441.

McGovern, T. V., Furumoto, L., Halpern, D. F., Kimble, G. A., & McKeachie, W. J. (1991). Liberal education, study in depth, and the arts and sciences major: psychology. American Psychologist, 46, 598-605.

Of the three articles, the most directly relevant, and possibly the most useful, is still McGovern et al (1991). However, reading all three articles will give students a good understanding of why psychologists have been, and continue to be, reluctant to propose a standardized curriculum for all students. The history is interesting, and the issue of standardization is one that extends well beyond the discipline of psychology.

2. A second source of information comes from examining the degree programs designed by other colleges. Students seeking to concentrate in psychology should collect at least six different programs from a variety of other colleges and universities. They should be examined for commonalities and differences, as well as for some basic underlying logic or structure. These catalogs are generally available in any library (as well as high-school guidance offices); however, students also should be able to access them through the Internet, in particular through a link to college catalogs via the Empire College website.

3. A third source comes from interviewing people who work as psychologists or who use psychology in their jobs. They should be asked about the studies they took that are useful to them, studies they undertook that have not been useful and studies they did not take that would have been useful. Finally, they can simply be asked for advice. Two or three such interviews can be very helpful to students as they design their degree programs.

Note: An undergraduate concentration in psychology is not sufficient for a career as a psychologist. The objective orientation and quantitative skills emphasized in most psychology studies, however, are highly regarded by many employers in almost any profession. Thus, the

concentration can be useful for those with bachelor's degrees that are immediately seeking work. For any professional work in psychology, however, a graduate degree, in many cases a Ph.D. or equivalent, is essential, and several of the better known options are described below.

Of course, a psychology concentration prepares students not just for graduate programs in psychology, but also for many other professional programs, such as in law, business, education, health or social work. If graduate study in any field is a possible goal, either immediately or in the near future, the degree program ought to be designed with that possibility in mind. Students should familiarize themselves with graduate school entrance requirements and make every effort to include them in their program.

Graduate Study

Psychology Ph.D. Programs

A Ph.D. is the degree of choice for those wishing to become a professional psychologist — either in applied areas (e.g., mental health and industry) or in higher education. Students who plan on pursuing a Ph.D. should take special care in the design of their programs. The following studies are almost mandatory:

- Statistics, research methods and laboratory studies: Not only do many graduate schools expect such studies, but they will be required again in graduate school. An initial exposure to them in an undergraduate program will make them somewhat easier to deal with later on.
- Exposure to the practice of psychology: It is particularly helpful if the student serves as a research assistant in a psychology laboratory or research project at a local college or university and/or does an internship with a known state or local nonprofit agency. The student's supervisor can provide invaluable letters of recommendation to the graduate schools. This experience is also an important indicator to the graduate school about the seriousness of the student's commitment to the field.
- Coverage of the "traditional" areas within psychology that are part of the Psychology Subject Test of the Graduate Record Examination (GRE): Information about the content of this test, which often is required of graduate-school applicants, can be found in the yearly GRE Information and Registration Bulletin. These probably can be obtained from your mentor or directly from the Educational Testing Service at www.gre.org. The latest booklet provides the following breakdown of the areas covered in the examination:
 - Experimental or natural science 40% - learning, language, memory, thinking, sensation and perception, physiological psychology and ethology.
 - Social science 43% - abnormal and clinical, developmental, social and personality.
 - General 17% - history, applied psychology, measurement, research designs and statistics.

Note: It is important that the undergraduate program be heavily academic (as opposed to vocational or professional). Graduate psychology departments are not impressed with counseling, therapy or psychoanalytic courses on undergraduate transcripts. The faculty in most Ph.D. programs believe that such courses should be undertaken only in graduate school.

Psy.D. Programs

The Doctorate in Psychology is a more recent degree designed for those with applied interests, particularly in clinical psychology, and with relatively less interest in the research and science emphases of

accredited Ph.D. programs. Although these programs differ from the Ph.D. programs, the requirements are quite similar. Details about their requirements should be obtained from the universities directly.

Master's in Social Work (MSW) Programs

The M.S.W. offers a faster route than the two doctoral programs to state-recognized credentials for doing clinical work with individual clients. In New York state, holders of this degree (along with those holding a Ph.D., Psy.D. or M.D. in psychiatry) can receive third-party payments as a therapist. Those schools that offer these programs are usually more flexible in the knowledge of psychology that they expect or require of their applicants. Some even may welcome the kinds of counseling experiences frowned upon in typical Ph.D. graduate psychology programs. A key activity here is to study the entrance requirements for particular programs. If possible, the graduate advisor at the schools that offer these programs should be interviewed; they might provide direct advice about a student's proposed degree plan.

Master's Degrees in Psychology

A number of master's programs in psychology can be found at many different colleges, either in the liberal arts or in specialty areas such as counseling or school psychology, art therapy, alcoholism studies and so forth. The general liberal arts programs clearly extend students' knowledge and understanding of psychology, and no doubt enhance their lives or work skills, but these programs are not intended as preparation for a profession.

The specialty programs, however, particularly if accredited by the appropriate professional association, do prepare students for work. The colleges or universities that offer them should be able to provide solid information about both requirements and curricula, and about post-graduate employment.

The Degree Program Rationale

Once the concentration studies have been selected according to the needs, interests and future plans of the student, the psychology concentration must be defended in a written rationale. Such a rationale will ordinarily include at least the following information:

- the student's goals or purposes in seeking a concentration in psychology
- a description of the activities undertaken to learn about psychology concentrations, namely: 1. books or articles read, 2. undergraduate catalogs consulted, 3. interviews undertaken and 4. if appropriate, graduate programs examined
- an accounting of what was learned from those activities
- a specification of how the studies selected in the concentration fit together
- a description of how the selected studies address the human development area of study guidelines
- an explanation of the underlying logic and structure of the entire degree program.