

# Psych *ACCESS*

The Official Undergraduate  
Psychology Newsletter



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## This issue:

We are happy for the return of Psych *ACCESS*, to share information related to the field of psychology.

We want to provide information relevant to undergraduates.

Inside, you'll find information related to jobs after graduating, graduate school, study tips, and faculty research interests.



Written by Students for Students



# Welcome Psychology Majors...now what?

## What To Do With a Degree in Psychology?

by Tyler Hassenfeldt

So you've picked Psych as your major, but you're wondering where you can go with that degree after graduation. Or maybe you're considering switching into Psych, but you don't know how versatile the degree is. Luckily, a Psych degree can be applicable to lots of different fields, and can be a great foundation for graduate or professional school.

### Grad School

If you're considering grad school, there are a number of steps you'll need to take to get prepared, including taking entrance exams like the GRE, MCAT, or LSAT, getting letters of recommendation, writing essays, and requesting transcripts. See a related article by Rachel Miller in this issue of Psych Access.

A post-graduation report from Career Services @ Virginia Tech (2013), based on students who graduated in 2012-2013, described the placements of Psychology students who enrolled in graduate or professional schools. Degrees sought included Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), Master's of Public Administration (MPA), Master of Science (MS), Master of Arts (MA), and Master of Public Health (MPH). Areas of study included education, higher education, school counseling, mental health counseling, clinical psychology, counseling psychology, global health, political science, forensic psychology, marriage and family therapy, epidemiology, criminal justice and criminology, finance, industrial/organizational psychology, exercise science, and social work. Doctoral degrees that were being pursued included Doctor of Psychology (PsyD), Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), and Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (DO). Other traditional professional degrees that a Psychology degree can help towards include law (JD) and medical degrees (MD).

### Industry

For individuals who don't see themselves continuing in academia or research, you'll probably be applying for jobs right out of school instead of seeking higher education. This is also a good way to get some hands-on experience in case you decide to go to grad school later on.

Another report from Career Services @ Virginia Tech (2013) listed jobs that Psychology students (2012-2013 graduates) had obtained in a wide variety of areas.

- Education/Human Services: teacher, physical therapy aide, family support worker, direct care provider
- Science/Medicine: research assistant, medical receptionist
- Business/Technology: IT consultant, business associate/consultant/analyst, recruiter, HR coordinator

Other jobs likely came as a result of a dual degree (e.g., software engineer, chemical engineer) or specialized skills (e.g., pilot trainee in the U.S. Air Force, officer in the U.S. Army). Other grads were employed full- or part-time in non-degree-related jobs such as working at a coffee shop, retail store, or pet daycare.

According to responses from 145 Psychology graduates (55% of the 265 that graduated in 2012-2013), 35% ( $n = 51$ ) were employed at a long-term job, were self-employed, worked at a family business, or had accepted a job offer. Of this employed group, 68% ( $n = 35$ ) reported salaries, with the median being \$33,000 (25% earned \$29,975 or less and 75% earned \$43,500 or less).

Clearly, a number of fields are open to Psych majors, including psychology, sociology, criminology, human development, poli sci, law, medicine, nursing, and business. The Career Center at UNC Wilmington (n.d.) has published a list of skills that many Psych majors have, including good written and oral communication, critical thinking and problem solving, interpersonal skills, good observation and analytical skills, and knowledge of human development and behavior. These skills can be widely applied to sales, education, helping professions, and human-related research, among others. At its core, Psychology combines influences from biology, philosophy, sociology, and other fields to prepare you for a number of opportunities observing, analyzing, marketing to, or working with other human beings.

For more information about career choices, you can refer to page 41 of the Handbook for Psychology Majors, available at

<http://www.psyc.vt.edu/undergrad>

Additionally, many resources are available at the Smith Career Center on campus, or on their website (<https://www.career.vt.edu/>).

\*\*Works Cited Below\*\*



# Study Tips for the Studious Student

## How to Maximize Your Study Potential

by Jared McGinley



I have had the fortune (or misfortune) of being a student for twenty-two years. This has provided me with ample opportunities to try, abandon, and then try new, study behaviors. What I have come to understand is that behaviors will differ in who they work for. This is largely the reason that I am about to introduce you to many different study tactics. I would recommend first trying ones that seem most appealing to you. If they don't work for you then don't hesitate to drop them and try new ones. The key is to not get stuck doing something that is ineffective. Keep trying new things until you find what works well for you. Much of what I am about to present to you arises out of personal experience, but I will also present some tried-and-true methods as supported by research. I will also briefly explain *why* some of these techniques should work.

Repetition is the only reliable way to ensure that you improve at something. Regardless of talent level, intelligence, or natural proclivity, repetition is what is required to succeed. No one sits down at a piano for the first time and writes a symphony; just as no one shows up to an exam and aces it with little or no exposure to the material. Practice makes perfect. Author Malcolm Gladwell writes about the "10,000 hour rule" in his top-selling book, *Outliers*. This rule refers to success as a product of practicing a particular task over-and-over again. I am by no means suggesting that you spend 10,000 hours studying for any of your courses, but the key to learning, retaining, and improving in any subject is to consistently practice it. Therefore,

if you ever want to get better as a student and retain material down the line, ditch your cramming sessions.

The most important behavior for effective studying is to make a schedule and stick to it. Pop culture author Stephen King provides some salient advice on this topic in his autobiography, *On Writing*, which has helped lead him to be the successful and prolific author that he is today. He simply sits down and writes for eight hours a day, every day, regardless of whether he is feeling inspired or not. No matter what, he generates ideas and makes progress on his book. The only way to truly maintain repetition is to stick to a schedule. Schedules can be wonderful tools if your goal is "progress". Use a Google calendar or bring around a notebook/scheduler that you *always* keep with you. Create a plan and stick to it. For example, I like to work on writing up publications on Fridays from noon-3pm and I never schedule anything else during that time. I need to conduct research on Wednesday and Thursday afternoons and never deviate from that schedule. This is part of the way to ensure that I get publications and keep a productive research plan. If you find yourself unable to perform a task regularly (e.g., reading chapters from the textbook) then schedule a weekly time that works for you and make sure to stick to it.

How do you stick to your self-imposed schedule? By making yourself accountable. It is often useful to make yourself accountable in some way to ensure that you regularly revisit the material. We would all love to have intrinsic interest in material, but the truth of the matter is that you often have to force yourself to sit down with it. Therefore, it is helpful to create a system and a group of friends to keep you accountable.

As an undergraduate student I used to keep a daily log of how long I spent doing work for each class. Therefore, I would know when I wasn't putting enough time into a particular class. Scheduling times with study groups and making your goals clear to others is a good way to make sure that you finish whatever task it is that you need to finish. Your study groups can include people taking completely different classes; the important thing is that you meet regularly and make your goals clear to each other.



### Communication is kind of a big deal

Stay away from your computer! Or at least turn off your Wi-Fi if you can. Humans can't multitask. Research has made this abundantly clear. You can switch between tasks, but you can't truly do more than one task at a time. It is inefficient and wastes time. This means that you can't be on social media, responding to emails, visiting websites, and still remain productive on your school work. Also, leave your phone somewhere else; you can survive without it for a while. If you schedule a few hours at the library or your favorite study spot, try your best to cut off access to the

## Continued

digital world.

People vary in what environment is best for them, so figure out what is best for you. Do you need complete silence to work? Do you need music on? Do you work best on your own or with others? Do you work better at Panera/Starbuck's/Mill Mountain? Do you work well in the library? Find out what context is best for your level of arousal and stick to it. My fiancée worked extremely well with a familiar TV show playing in the background. It defied reason and logic to me, but she was first in her class, so it obviously worked. I prefer a quiet setting, so I like to stick to my office, or a reading room in the library. Be honest with yourself; if you don't work well in silence or with others, then work by yourself or with music on. With all this said, however, a change of pace can be nice too. Sometimes your study spot isn't working for you, so it might be good to change it up. I sometimes like to work at Panera, because it's an environment where many people are clearly being productive. I just have noise-cancelling headphones to maintain a semblance of my usual quiet environment.

Do the hard stuff early in the day. Research shows that we lose will power as the day progresses. This is why it's easier to avoid eating sweets early in the day, but it's hard at night. It's also why it's hard to make yourself go to bed early. Will power and self-regulation are

limited resources. We have a larger store of those resources early in the day so that is a good time to tackle the tasks that we are least motivated to pursue. Focus on your most challenging class or the assignment that you don't want to do early in the day. This way you can do the easier/less aversive tasks later when you have used up most of your self-regulatory energy.

### Other things to make note of:

-Sleep!!!!!!! At the most basic, neural, level, you make connections and retain information when you get adequate sleep.

-Go to class, silly. It's basically a 50 or 75 minute period of studying.

-Take a small break about every 50-60 minutes. Eat some food or walk around. I do not recommend going on the computer or watching TV. However, I do recommend taking some type of break, because there is clear scientific evidence that our ability to focus peaks at about 45-50 minutes. After that, your brain (and interest level) begins to fatigue.

-Prepare material as though you are going to teach it to others; this requires you to become an expert! I might even go as far as to make PowerPoint presentations. This tactic is useful, because it brings out your deficiencies; it draws attention to what you do not know.

-Set up rewards for yourself. If you want to buy a latté, eat ice cream, go to the gym, or

visit your favorite blog then set it up as a reward for getting work done. I make sure not to get into my pint of Ben & Jerry's before I complete grading assignments or creating a lecture during that evening.

-Get a group of friends to work with. Find people that are reliable. It makes studying more bearable and even somewhat transforms it into a social event.

-Manage your time. Don't let the exam/assignment/project sneak up on you. Take your syllabus and schedule out times to complete the task. Even if you fall behind, you have still made some progress and you won't have a slapdash, anxiety-producing finish.

-Break up the workload into small chunks over multiple time periods.

There are many things to digest, but I think the most important variables to consider are: time of day, level of arousal, environment, accountability, and scheduling. These things will help you avoid doing work when you're stressed or anxious, because if you work while you're stressed then you will likely develop negative feelings toward the material, itself. If you try to address each of these, then I don't see how you won't improve in your academic performance!

## The Graduate Application Process: How to be Competitive and Ready

by Rachel Miller

Deciding to apply to graduate school can be a long and stressful process. Further, it is difficult to determine when to start preparing for graduate school and what it takes to be a competitive applicant. However, this process can be much smoother with a little planning and preparation. Below are several recommendations based on frequently asked questions regarding graduate school applications.

### **When should I start looking into graduate school?**

Begin to consider whether or not you want to pursue graduate school in your junior year, if not earlier. Talk with

graduate students in your department, department faculty, or friends that are currently in graduate school about their experiences. It is important to determine what kind of career you want to pursue, and what graduate training is required for that field. Do you want to pursue counseling? Social work? Clinical psychology? Moreover, do you want to pursue a research-oriented career or practice-oriented career? It can be very helpful to seek out individuals in those careers and discuss their work experience thus far, such as what kind of graduate training they received, what kind of work they do on a regular basis, and what they enjoy about their job.

On a related note, consider the duration and cost of these programs. Depending on your field and degree, some will be 1-2 years, whereas others will be 5-6 years. Further, some programs are fully funded, whereas others are not.

### **What kinds of qualifications do I need to be a strong applicant?**

Each type of graduate program has their own set of requirements. In general, PhD programs are more competitive than Masters programs and require a different set of experiences. At a basic level, you will need to have a GPA and GRE scores that are within that programs' typical range, which you can usually find out



## Dr. Michael Braun

Dr. Braun is a new faculty member who joined the VT team in Fall 2013. This I/O based lab is interested in exploring how teams affect decision making, leadership and knowledge building. Other interests include: sequential decision making, team cohesion, statistical randomness in growth processes, and model multilevel phenomena.

# FACULTY PLACE

by Tashauna Blankenship



## Dr. Robin Panneton

The infant-Language Emotion Attention Perception (i-LEAP) lab focuses on infant language, emotion, attention, and perception development. They explore these constructs using looking times, heart rate activity, eye tracking, and joint attention. Current projects include the effects of emotion on infant language development and social influences on word-object learning. Dr. Panneton, along with her collaborators (Dr. S. Ramey, Dr. C. Ramey, and Dr. King-Casas) were recently awarded a grant for their project entitled *Learning Trajectories Toward Cognitive, Social, Language Outcomes in Low- and High-Risk Infants*.

## Continued

from their website. Many programs have cut-off GRE scores that will help you determine whether or not you would be considered a strong applicant. Also look into whether your programs require other test scores, such as the GRE Psychology, etc.

However, there are several other factors that carry weight in the admissions process. Your undergraduate coursework should demonstrate that you have the necessary background training for that field. Many programs will have requirements for basic coursework (think research methods and statistics) and then coursework specific to their area (such as Abnormal Psychology for a clinical psychology program). Having relevant research experience is also necessary, particularly for PhD programs. Moreover, your letters of recommendation can speak to your skills that make you a strong fit for their program. Therefore, select your recommenders based on whether they can speak to these abilities. Lastly, your personal statement is your chance to highlight all of the training and experiences that make you a strong candidate for their program. Think of the personal statement as a sales pitch, rather than a repeat of your CV/resumé, in which you discuss what *you* can bring to their program.

### When should I start preparing for graduate school?

After careful consideration of what kind of graduate training fits your needs and what kinds of qualifications you will need, then is the time to start preparing! Again, junior year is a good time to start getting ready for graduate school. An important first step is taking the Graduate Record Examination (GRE). Ideally, take the GRE in the spring of your junior year or the summer before senior year, as it will give you time to retake the GRE if you would like to improve your scores.

The summer months are also a good time to gain relevant work experience to demonstrate that you are prepared for your intended field. Consider pursuing relevant research opportunities or field work in the summers before your junior and senior year. If you are unsure about which opportunities may be best suited for your needs, consult with your advisor or perhaps one of your professors for recommendations. Continuing to be involved in a research lab relevant to your interests during the school year is also strongly recommended. When working in a lab, make an effort to get diverse training on a variety of projects.

The summer before you senior year, start to look into which graduate schools you would like to apply. As you narrow down your list of potential programs, it is helpful to email graduate students in those programs to learn more about how they like the program and the different experiences they have. If you want to begin graduate school directly after college, the fall of your senior year is the time to ask for recommendation letters, edit your resumé or CV, write your personal statement, and compile your application materials. For PhD programs, you will likely want to consider which faculty members you would be interesting in working with and contact them in the fall to ensure that they are accepting students.

### Should I take a year off before applying to graduate school?

Consider what kind of program you want to apply to and whether you have the necessary training to be a competitive applicant. If you feel like you need more time after college to gain relevant experience and improve your qualifications, then a year off might be beneficial. However, it is key that you take this time off to bolster these experiences. For example, a student who wishes to enter a research-focused graduate program in developmental psychology might take a year off to work full-time in a university research lab that focuses on child development.

For more specific information about graduate school application process, refer to the following resources:

*Clinical and Counseling Psychology: Insider's Guide to Graduate Programs in Clinical and Counseling Psychology: 2012/2013 Edition*, John C. Norcross & Michael A. Sayette

*Applying to Graduate School in Psychology: Advice From Successful Students and Prominent Psychologists*, Amanda Kracen & Ian Wallace

"Mitch's Uncensored Advice for Applying to Graduate School in Clinical Psychology"  
<http://www.unc.edu/~mjp1970/Mitch's%20Grad%20School%20Advice.pdf>

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Amanda Halliburton is a 3<sup>rd</sup> year graduate student in the clinical science area. Her research interests focus on adolescent treatment, particularly using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) in individual and family settings. She is also interested in prevention of adolescent risk behaviors

Tyler Hassenfeldt is a 4<sup>th</sup> year graduate student in Clinical Psychology. Her main area of research is children with Autism Spectrum Disorders and ways to support their neurotypical siblings and family members. Additional clinical interests include anxiety, ADHD, and externalizing behaviors in children.

Jared McGinley is a 5<sup>th</sup> year graduate student in Biological Psychology at Virginia Tech. His research is focused on the biological correlates of emotions and empathy.

Rachel Miller is a 2<sup>nd</sup> year graduate student in the Clinical science program. She works with Dr. Julie Dunsmore in the Social Development Lab. Her primary research interests focus on the clinical applications of developmental psychology, including parents' emotion socialization, children's emotion regulation, and developmental psychopathology

Deanna Swain is a 1<sup>st</sup> year in the clinical science graduate program. She is particularly interested in examining the relationship between mechanisms of change in therapies and their impact on the biology and behavior of children with ASD as a method for better implementing targeted evidence-based interventions.

Jonathan Waldron is a 4<sup>th</sup> year in the clinical science graduate program. His research focuses on the social psychophysiological correlates of violence perpetration and victimization. He is particularly interested in understanding psychopathy and empathy relationships.

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