What Can I Do With a Degree in Psychology?

Each year, approximately 73,000 to 75,000 students graduate from a four-year college with a degree in psychology. By graduation, many students have heard the all too familiar phrase, “You’ll never get a job with a psychology degree.” It is true that you cannot be a licensed psychologist or call yourself a “psychologist” with a B.A. or B.S. degree. However, you can still find work in social services, companies, or organizations that value the skills taught in psychology classes. Furthermore, psychology is a preprofessional degree that can prepare you for graduate school in law, medicine (including medical school, physician assistant programs, dental school, physical therapy, and others), counseling, social work, and psychology. (Note that medical programs have additional undergraduate requirements for admission.)

Employers and graduate school admissions committees assume that students with a degree in psychology have strong interpersonal skills, the ability to think critically and explain their reasoning to others in a clear manner, experience analyzing data, and excellent writing skills. The breadth of training during undergraduate psychology programs often makes psychology students more attractive to prospective employers than students who have earned degrees in fields that are more narrowly focused.

According to a recent survey by the American Psychological Association, psychology graduates can earn anywhere from $24,000 to $35,000 (as of 2001) with a B.S./B.A. CMU’s Office of Career Services also publishes the results of yearly salary surveys. In 2002-2003, for example, CMU psychology majors landed jobs paying $19,000-34,000, with an average salary of $26,368. (To access recent data, click into www.careers.cmich.edu, then into “students” and “employment survey summary.”) Jobs in health care and social services traditionally pay the least, whereas jobs in business and sales pay the most. (To find current average salaries for psychology careers, go to www.apa.org and click into “Students” and “Salary Survey.”) The following resources offer good advice for graduates who are trying to navigate their way through the job market. (The books are in our library but are also available for purchase at www.apa.org.)


To compare psychology with other possible careers, visit the Occupational Outlook Handbook at www.bls.gov/oco.