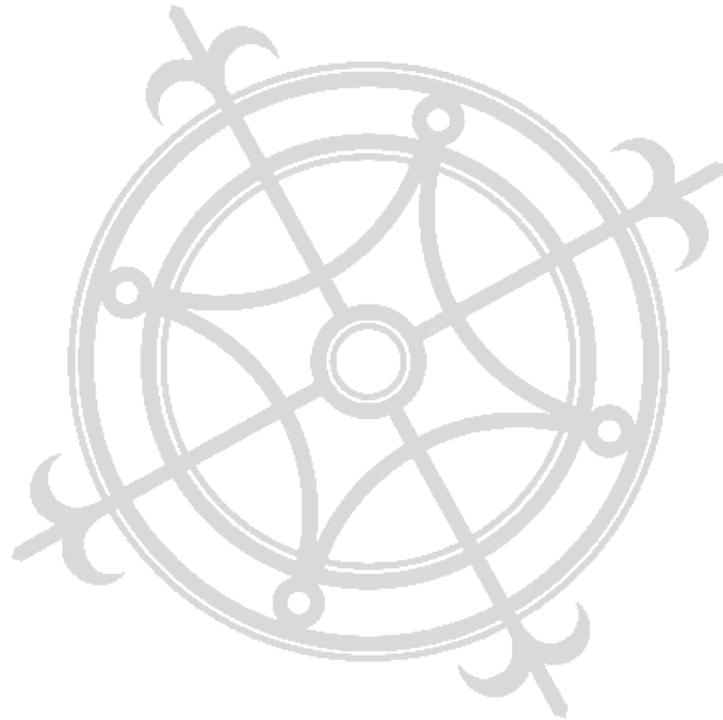


clinical &  
counseling  
careers in  
**psychology**





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# thinking of a career in psychology?

## Which Graduate Degree Do I Choose?

Several different graduate degrees may prepare you to pursue a clinical or counseling career in psychology; you must determine which one provides the best match for your academic preparation, intellectual interests, and career goals. A brief description of the most commonly pursued degrees follows. For additional information about differences among degrees and related topics, see the following books available in the Human Ecology Career Exploration Center, 162 MVR or in the Arts and Sciences Career Library, 55 Goldwin Smith Hall.

\* *Getting In: A Step by Step Plan for Gaining Admission to Graduate School in Psychology.* (2007). American Psychological Association. Washington, DC. (Can be purchased from APA, 800-374-2721, or online at [www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org))

\* *Graduate Study in Psychology, 2009.* (2008). American Psychological Association (APA). Washington, DC. (Can be purchased from APA)

*The Insider's Guide to Graduate Programs in Clinical and Counseling Psychology: 2008/2009 Edition.* (2008). John C. Norcross, Michael A. Sayette, and Tracy J. Mayne. New York: The Guilford Press.

\* denotes highly recommended

## Commonly Pursued Degrees

### Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology

- A research based degree providing training to be a scientist, scholar, and practitioner. A versatile degree: it allows you to work in mental health settings and hospitals, private practice, research, teaching, and consulting. Clinical psychologists with a Ph.D. can work in health care settings with patients with more severe disorders. They can teach in psychology departments and their research is experimental psychological research.
- Very competitive admissions standards.
- For all Ph.D. programs, it's common for applicants to apply to work specifically with a faculty mentor rather than to a program. If a mentor is not taking on students that year, it doesn't matter how qualified an applicant is: if the mentor is not accepting students, the applicant will not be accepted to the program. Many faculty post whether or not they are accepting students on their web pages; applicants may also send a brief inquiry to the faculty mentor as well.
- Programs are typically in university psychology departments, though some are in medical schools.
- Ph.D involves no loans and tuition waivers--many fund you with teaching or research assistantships.

- APA accredited programs lead to licensing.
- No APA accredited master's degree in clinical psychology.
- Students usually need to complete a year or two as a full-time research assistant before they apply.
- Time frame: 4 to 5 years of graduate school, 1 year APA-approved clinical internship is mandatory for degree completion, and possibly a postdoctoral position.

### **Psy.D. in Clinical Psychology**

- Provides training to be a practitioner, usually in private practice or community mental health centers. Heavily based on course work and clinical experiential training; rather than research.
- Programs can be in professional schools or in universities.
- Typically admission is less competitive than clinical psychology Ph.D. programs. Some programs prefer applicants with more work and life experience.
- Programs (especially in professional schools) are funded through loans and no tuition waivers are offered. Teaching or research assistantships aren't provided.
- APA accredited programs lead to licensing.
- No APA accredited master's degree in clinical psychology.
- Students are often accepted directly from Cornell.
- Time frame: 4 years of graduate school, 1 year APA-approved clinical internship is mandatory for degree completion. For some programs, graduate school can be completed in 3 years, including summers, followed by 1 year of internship.
- Selecting appropriate Psy.D. program can be more difficult than for Ph.D. programs; be sure to consider internship success rates, as some Psy.D. programs have low rates of placing students into APA-approved internships. Others have excellent internship success but it is worth looking at the internship rates in advance.

### **Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology**

- Provides training to be a practitioner, typically in private practice or counseling centers, e.g. university counseling centers. It is also possible to work in mental health centers or hospitals and conduct research. Allows you to teach in counselor education and some psychology departments. Research methods used by counseling psychologists generally include structured tests, interviews, interest inventories and observations. They deal more with personal growth and adjustment problems, rather than



psychopathology; extensive undergraduate work in psychology is often not required.

- Usually in university psychology or counselor education.
- Admission is typically less competitive than clinical psychology Ph.D. programs.
- You can receive a master's degree, and in some states, obtain a license to engage in a private practice with a master's degree. New York State has recently added a process for individuals with master's degrees to become licensed. Regulations vary by state. Contact the state to get the latest information (see contact information under licensing below). Some individuals admitted already have master's degrees in psychology or counseling, others go directly into Ph.D. programs.
- Popularity of the Psy.D. in clinical psychology is growing, so fewer students are pursuing a Ph.D. in counseling psychology.
- Time frame: 4 years of graduate school, 1 year of internship.

### **M.D. in Psychiatry**

- Area of specialization studied after receiving a medical degree. Typically leads to a practice doing psychiatric diagnosis and therapy. Can prescribe medication, but typically do not perform psychological tests (compared to Ph.D.s in clinical psychology who typically perform tests, but cannot prescribe medication).
- Time frame: 4 years of medical school, 4 years of residency.

### **Master's Degree in School Psychology**

- Provides training to become a psychologist in a school setting for those interested in children, families and the schooling process. Allows you to perform testing, assessment, and counseling and provide consultation to children, parents, and teachers. A Ph.D. in school psychology provides the opportunity to teach in a school psychology program, but is not necessarily an advantage as a practitioner in an elementary or secondary school setting.
- Programs are typically in school psychology or psychology departments, and admission is less competitive than Ph.D. programs in psychology.
- Salaries parallel teachers' pay scales.
- Time frame: 2 years of course work and internships. Number and duration of internships vary depending on the program.

### **Master's Degree in Social Work (M.S.W.)**

- Provides training to be a practitioner working in a mental health clinic, hospital, nursing homes, human service agency, or private practice. Allows you to consult with businesses, but not to teach or perform psychological tests. A versatile degree that is increasingly in demand given the trend toward managed health care in the US. A doctorate provides the opportunity to teach in a social work program, but is not needed to work as a practitioner.
  - Programs are typically in university social work departments.
  - Less competitive admission than Ph.D. programs.
  - Time frame: 2 years of course work which includes 450 hours of field placement. Licensure examinations are required and determined by US and Canadian jurisdictions.
- 

### **Median Hourly Rates**

Psychiatrist: \$144 (2021)

Ph.D. in Clinical or Counseling Psychology or Psy.D: \$55 (2022)

M.S.W: \$33 (2022)

\* Note: Salaries can vary a great deal by practice type and geographical location, and the American Psychological Association does not track hourly rates as it may be considered “fixing the market.” For an annual salary predictor, visit Salary Wizard at [www.salary.com](http://www.salary.com) and enter job title and geographic location.

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### **Licensing**

Licensing may have some bearing on your choice of a degree program depending on the career option you hope to pursue. Each state has its own licensing requirements. If you know in which state you want to practice, you may want to find out which programs automatically allow you to sit for the state licensing exam. For information on New York State requirements, call the Office of the Professions within the Department of Education at 518-474-3817 or visit them online at <http://www.op.nysed.gov/>.

When investigating programs you may want to ask questions about how easy it is for graduates to get licensed. In most states, APA-approved internships are required for licensure to practice therapy, so checking internship placement rates of schools can be useful. If you have questions about whether a specific degree will allow you to be licensed in a particular specialty area in New York State, the Office of the Professions web site also has helpful information.

### **After I Choose a Degree, How Do I Choose a Program?**

You will want to attend a program accredited by the American Psychological Association (APA). Graduate Study in Psychology, published by the APA, provides the most comprehensive information about different programs. It gives profiles of programs in the United States and Canada, including the theoretical orientation of the department, characteristics of students, how it weighs admissions criteria, the number of applications and acceptances, and financial assistance offered.

After reading a school's profile in Graduate Study in Psychology, you should obtain and read the school's catalogue or read their information on their website. In addition, visiting the school and speaking to current students and faculty members should provide you with information on the following variables that you should consider when selecting programs.

1. Does the theoretical orientation of the school match your theoretical interests? For example, is it cognitive behavioral? Does it emphasize a clinical science approach to treatment?
2. Is the location and quality of life appealing?
3. Do the current research interests of faculty match your own?
4. What is the funding situation? Are tuition waivers and stipends provided?
5. Does the program's balance on the research/clinical dimension match your interests?
6. What is the quality of the research facilities and laboratories?
7. What is the quality of the clinical facilities? Where do you see patients? Where are the clinical supervisors?

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### **What Should I Major In?**

While many programs do not require an undergraduate psychology major, they require the completion of a number of psychology courses. Majoring in psychology or human development is an easy way to complete the coursework that is required for admission. Check specific graduate programs for their requirements.

### **What Courses Should I Take?**

Different programs will have different requirements; check the specific requirements of programs that interest you. It is generally recommended that you take courses in these seven areas:

1. Statistics
2. Additional and higher level courses in Statistics such as Experimental Methods or Research Design
3. Abnormal Psychology
4. Personality
5. Developmental Psychology or Child Development
6. Cognitive Psychology
7. Social Psychology

See the list of recommended courses in this booklet. Some programs will require courses in additional areas of psychology.

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### **How Difficult Is It To Gain Admission?**

Admission to clinical psychology programs is highly competitive. Individual programs typically accept fewer than a dozen applicants each year. According to a recent national study, 10% of applicants to APA accredited clinical psychology programs were admitted. The acceptance rate for Cornell students may be somewhat higher. The attached description of admission factors provides more detailed information on selection criteria. Generally, Ph.D. programs in counseling psychology and Psy.D. programs have less competitive admissions standards. Admission to master's degree programs in social work and school psychology is also less competitive.



**Where Can I Go With  
Additional Questions?**

The Human Ecology Career Exploration Center and the Arts & Sciences Career Library have a number of resources which provide extensive information on clinical psychology and related fields. See the list at the end of this booklet. Arts & Sciences students can see the Arts & Sciences advisor in 172 Goldwin Smith Hall.

Faculty with relevant background and interests in the Departments of Psychology and Human Development can provide information on the reputation of programs, trends in the field, and the application process. Human Ecology students can see an advisor in the Human Ecology Office of Student and Career Development.

You can arrange informational interviews with professionals in career fields of interest to ask questions about the field and graduate education. Cornell's Career Guide provides suggestions for conducting these informational interviews. You can also ask career related questions of Cornell alumni through the CCNet mentors on the Cornell Career Services website at [www.career.cornell.edu](http://www.career.cornell.edu). Human Ecology students may connect with Human Ecology alumni through the Cornell Alumni Mentor Program for Students (CAMPS) at: <http://hecamps.chronus.com/p/main/about>.

# admission factors

## What Are Schools Looking For?

It is difficult to state definitively the factors that will determine your admission to a graduate program in clinical psychology. Each program has its own admissions standards and requirements. These variables make it difficult to define one set of standards that apply to all programs. In the case of Ph. D. programs in clinical or counseling psychology, each faculty mentor may have specific admissions standards. However, almost all consider the factors cited below in looking at potential entrants.

### Objective Criteria

- GPA (overall GPA, psychology GPA, and last-2-years GPA)
- Standardized test scores (GRE-V, GRE-Q, GRE-Analytical, and GRE-Psychology; MAT)
- Coursework (number of hours, subject area, and level)

### Nonobjective Criteria

- Letters of recommendation
- Experience
- Research experience
- Clinically-related public service
- Application essays
- Interview performance
- Extracurricular activities

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## GPA

The average minimum GPA that most programs look for is 3.5. However, the way in which GPAs are rated varies from program to program. Some will have different required GPAs, others will look more closely at the last two years' GPA, and others will also look at the GPA you received in psychology courses. You need to consult individual program descriptions in Graduate Study in Psychology to determine the required and preferred minimums for each program. Program committees are also aware that a certain GPA is more difficult to obtain at some schools than others.

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## GRE Scores

About 90% of clinical psychology programs require you to take the GRE General and Psychology Subject tests. The average minimum score required for serious consideration for clinical psychology is 600 for any one component of the GRE general test. Consult individual programs for their acceptance rates based on GRE scores. The general test should be taken at the end of your junior year or early in your senior year.

You should prepare to take the GRE Psychology Subject test by studying a good introductory psychology textbook. The average



minimum score required on the Subject test is 650. Take this test in the fall of your senior year. A few programs use MAT scores as part of the admissions process. The average minimum MAT score required is 70. Many programs use test scores in conjunction with GPAs as an initial screening criterion.

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### **Coursework**

Individual programs vary a great deal when it comes to undergraduate psychology course requirements and preferences. Refer to Graduate Study in Psychology for admissions requirements specific to individual programs.

While it is difficult to generalize, many graduate psychology programs are more interested in generalists than specialists; graduate programs are considered the appropriate place to specialize. Therefore, a broad undergraduate education is often considered to be the best possible preparation. This means, in addition to psychology, your coursework should cover a range of disciplines including physical and biological sciences, math, English literature and composition, history, philosophy, sociology and anthropology, and a foreign language. Laboratory based natural or biological science courses taken from departments other than psychology can nicely complement your training in psychological methods and theory.

Programs tend to be biased toward math and science courses, because taking these courses conveys a certain willingness and ability on your part to engage in scientific pursuits. Research experience is highly regarded; therefore it is to your advantage to take lab based classes and courses with professors who are currently engaged in research with which you might be able to assist.

A listing of suggested Cornell University courses is included on page 11 in this booklet.

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### **Letters of Recommendation**

You will need to obtain an average of 3 letters of recommendation for applying to most graduate programs. Letters of recommendation are often considered to be the most important nonobjective criterion. Ideally, recommendations should be from faculty who know you well enough to provide specific information about your potential to succeed in graduate school and in a career in clinical psychology. You can get to know faculty through independent studies, research, seminars and/or informal meetings. At least two of your letters should be from faculty. The third could come from a supervisor of a clinically related public service activity, especially if he/she has a Ph.D. or M.D.

## Experience

### Research Experience

In general, research experience is valued most highly by clinical psychology programs. The quality of the research experience is much more important than the content area. You should be intimately involved in the design and implementation of the research. In addition to psychology, research in fields such as biology, nutrition, or sociology can be appropriate.

### Clinically-related Public Service

Other psychology related work experiences, paid or volunteer, are viewed positively and can help you assess your suitability for a clinical career. Clinically related public service includes the provision of most human services related to mental health.

Programs do make distinctions among specific kinds of experiences and evaluate them differently, depending on the type of program and its particular orientation. Review Graduate Study in Psychology for specific criteria for each program you are considering. If you must decide between types of psychology related work experiences, it is to your advantage to select research because of the high value placed on research by clinical psychology programs. Participating in research is also a valuable method for investigating the field and perhaps developing a mentoring relationship with a faculty member.

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## Application Essays

Essays are taken quite seriously in evaluating applications. They allow you to elaborate on your unique qualifications and are evidence of your preparation for graduate study, thoughtfulness, writing ability, and appropriate creativity. The most typical themes targeted by these essays are your long-term career plans; your areas of interest in psychology; your research, practice-based, and teaching experiences; and your reasons for choosing a particular program. It may be helpful to have your statement reviewed by your advisor or another faculty member.

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## Interview Performance

Many programs request interviews. If you are asked to appear for an interview, chances are that you are among the pool of applicants being seriously considered for admission. The interviewer will be interested in assessing how well you seem to fit into the program. You should thoroughly acquaint yourself with the program's training model, areas of concentration, and philosophy; have some familiarity with faculty members and their areas of interest; and be able to show how your interests and qualifications fit the program. The interview is an opportunity for them to assess your personal characteristics. Individual faculty may be viewing a candidate with an eye to whether you might be interested in working in his/her area of research. Travel to and from interviews is often paid for by the applicant.

## **Extracurricular Activities**

These are not as critical as they were when applying to an undergraduate program. Membership in psychology related organizations can be helpful. For a list of organizations, refer to the resources section of *Getting In: A Step by Step Plan for Gaining Admission to Graduate School in Psychology*.

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## **What Should I Do If I Don't Get In The First Time?**

Admission to clinical psychology programs is extremely competitive. It is important for you to have a back-up plan if you are denied admission the first time. You have several alternatives:

- Apply to other programs for the same school year
- Reapply to the same programs or apply to other graduate psychology programs after gaining additional experiences
- Consider alternatives to a graduate degree in psychology

First assess your credentials against the admissions requirements of the specific program where you were denied admission and determine whether you set your sights too high. If your credentials were very good, the competition for this year or the programs you chose may have been exceptionally intense.

You can examine programs that have late application dates and apply after you've been denied at your original schools. The APA Education Directorate compiles a list of programs that have openings after April 15 available May 15. Contact the APA at 800-374-2721 to receive the list or view it at [www.apa.org/ed](http://www.apa.org/ed).

If you decide to wait and reapply, you should first determine whether you should reapply to programs where you were chosen as an alternate but didn't get in, or to programs where you were denied. Programs where you were chosen as an alternate are good bets because they expressed interest in your qualifications. For schools that firmly rejected you, contact them to see if they'd consider another application from you. Try to determine how to strengthen your candidacy and demonstrate additional qualifications that you may have acquired.

Prior to reapplication be sure to evaluate your credentials against program admission requirements and also be certain that you're selecting schools that match your qualifications. The period between applications should be used to improve your qualifications to increase your chances for acceptance. Consider taking or retaking courses, retaking tests, or obtaining solid research or clinical experience.

\* adapted from *Getting In: A Step by Step Plan for Gaining Admission to Graduate School in Psychology* (2007) American Psychological Association.

## recommended courses

### **Courses**

It is important to develop a solid foundation in basic psychology and supplement that with additional coursework in a specific topic/subject depending on interest. It is recommended that you complete coursework in each of seven areas: statistics, experimental methods, biological bases of behavior, personality, psychopathology, social groups, and cultural influences on development. Cornell University courses recommended for application to clinical psychology programs are listed below. To assist you in building the recommended level of knowledge, where possible, we've delineated which courses could serve as the basic foundation in a particular area and which courses would provide additional study.

It should be noted that the list below provides courses from which students can select. It is not necessary to complete them all, as long as you have selected courses from each of the seven primary areas. However, because many graduate programs have specific course requirements, be sure to consult the particular program requirements listed in Graduate Study in Psychology.

### **Basic Statistics**

AEM 2100 Introductory Statistic  
BTRY 3010 Biological Statistics I  
ILRST 2100 Introductory Statistics  
ILRST 2120 Statistical Reasoning  
MATH 1710 Statistical Theory & Application in the Real World  
PAM 2100 Introduction to Statistics  
PSYCH 3500 Statistics and Research Design  
SOC 3010 Evaluating Statistical Evidence

HD strongly recommends that students who plan to complete the HD Honors Program requirements take PSYCH 3500. The program also requires a second semester of advanced statistics, and HD 4750 or HD 4760 is recommended. These recommendations are also applicable to students planning to pursue a Ph.D. in clinical psychology.

### **Experimental Methods**

HD 3820: Research Methods in Human Development  
PSYCH 4910: Research Methods in Psychology



### **Biological Bases of Behavior**

HD 2200: Biological Issues in Human Development  
HD 3200: Human Developmental Neuropsychology  
HD 3660: Emotional Functions of the Brain  
PSYCH 3320/BIONB 3280: Biopsychology of Learning & Memory  
HD 3440: Infant Behavior and Development  
HD/BSOC/NS 3470: Biological and Behavioral Interactions  
PSYCH 3610/NS 3610: Biopsychology of Normal & Abnormal Behavior  
HD 4660: Psychobiology of Temperament and Personality  
PSYCH 4220: Developmental Biopsychology  
PSYCH 4250: Cognitive Neuroscience  
HD 4330: Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience  
HD 4780: Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder in Children

### **Personality**

HD 2600/PSYCH 2750: Introduction to Personality  
HD 3490: Positive Psychology  
HD 4660: Psychobiology of Temperament & Personality  
PSYCH 4890: Beliefs, Attitudes & Ideologies

### **Psychopathology**

HD 3300: Developmental Psychopathology  
HD 3530: Risk & Opportunity Factors in Childhood & Adolescence  
HD/PSYCH 3270/3280: Field Practicum I & II  
HD 3700/PSYCH 3250: Adult Psychopathology  
HD 4680: Stress in Childhood & Adolescence  
HD 4770: Psychopathology in Great Works of Literature

### **Social Groups**

PSYCH 2800: Introduction to Social Psychology  
PSYCH 4810: Advanced Social Psychology

### **Cultural Influences on Development**

HD 3510: Racial and Ethnic Identity Development  
HD 4520: Culture and Human Development

All resources are available at the Human Ecology Career Exploration Center and the Arts & Sciences Career Services unless noted.

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**Websites** **American Psychological Association:** APA services, and related resources, [www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org)

**Mitch Prinstein's Guide for Clinical Psychology Graduate Schools:** Mitch Prinstein is the John Van Seters Distinguished Professor and Director of Clinical Psychology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, [www.unc.edu/~mjp1970/Mitch%27s%20Grad%20School%20Advice.pdf](http://www.unc.edu/~mjp1970/Mitch%27s%20Grad%20School%20Advice.pdf)

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### Investigating Graduate Schools

**Getting In: A Step by Step Plan for Gaining Admission to Graduate School in Psychology.** (2007). American Psychological Association (APA). Washington, DC: APA.

*Examine whether a graduate degree in psychology is the right choice; how to select programs; and how to apply. Appendix: timetable; State & Provincial Boards and Agencies for the Statutory Licensure or Certification of Psychologists; sample recommendation; and The Minority Fellowship Program.*

**Graduate Study in Psychology.** (2008). American Psychological Association (APA). Washington, DC: APA.

*Descriptions of APA-approved graduate programs by state.*

**The Insider's Guide to Graduate Programs in Clinical and Counseling Psychology: 2008/2009 Edition.** (2008). John C. Norcross, Michael A. Sayette, and Tracy J. Mayne. New York: The Guilford Press.

*How to prepare; apply; interview; and make the final decision.*

**The Complete Guide to Graduate School Admission: Psychology, Counseling, and Related Professions.** (2000). Patricia Keith-Spiegel, Ph.D., and Michael W. Wiederman, Mah-wah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

*An overview of the pursuit of graduate study in psychology and related fields including details about the application process and what to do once you've applied. (55 Goldwin Smith only)*

**Preparing for Graduate Study in Psychology: 101 Questions and Answers.** (2007). William Buskist and Carolyn Burke. Boston: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

*FAQ's on choosing a program, GRE, applying, interviewing, and more. Appendix: timetable, vitae outline, letters of intent, areas of psychology, and ranking information. (55 Goldwin Smith only)*

## Investigating Careers

**Career Paths in Psychology: Where Your Degree Can Take You.** (2006). Robert J. Sternberg, ed. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

*Focuses on career fields in psychology such as academia, clinical practice, organizational psychology and consumer psychology. (55 Goldwin Smith only)*

**Careers in Psychology: Opportunities in a Changing World.** (2004). Tara L. Kuther and Robert D. Morgan. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Thomson Learning.

*Includes general job search information and specific careers related to various subfields in psychology.*

**Great Jobs for Psychology Majors.** (2006). Julie De Galan and Stephen Lambert. Lincolnwood, IL: VGM Career Horizons, NTC Publishing Group.

*Information on the job search and possible career paths.*

**Majoring in Psych? Career Options for Psychology Undergraduates.** (2008). Betsy Levonian Morgan and Ann J. Korschgen. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

*Provides general information on choosing the major , exploring careers, graduate school and the job search.*

**Opportunities in Psychology Careers.** (2001). Charles M. Super, Ph.D. and Donald E. Super, Ph.D. Lincolnwood, IL: VGM Career Horizons, NTC Publishing Group.

*Discusses the fields of psychology; prospects; education and training; and scientific and professional organizations in psychology.*

**Opportunities in Social Work Careers.** (2002). Renee Wittenberg. Lincolnwood, IL: VGM Career Horizons, NTC Publishing Group.

*Describes social work settings; breakdown of jobs; qualifications & training; and expectations in the field. (103 Barnes only)*

**What Can You Do with a Major in Psychology?** (2005). Shelley O'Hara. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Publishing , Inc.

*Describes various careers possibilities for psychology majors and provides several detailed profiles of real people, their jobs and how they found them.*

