

Areas of Specialization in Psychology That Require Graduate School

The descriptions of the following areas of specialization in psychology that require a graduate degree were taken verbatim from APA's online brochure titled *Psychology: Scientific Problem Solvers—Careers for the 21st Century* (APA, 2003). This brochure provides a wealth of information about careers in psychology, and I recommend it highly.

Clinical Psychology

Clinical psychologists assess and treat people with psychological problems. They act as therapists for people experiencing normal psychological crises (e.g., grief) or for individuals suffering from chronic psychiatric disorders. Some are generalists who work with a wide variety of populations, while others work with specific groups like children, the elderly, or those with specific disorders (e.g., schizophrenia). They may be found in hospitals, community health centers, or private practice.

Counseling Psychology

Counseling psychologists do many of the same things that clinical psychologists do. However, counseling psychologists tend to focus more on persons with adjustment problems, rather than on persons suffering from severe psychological disorders. Counseling psychologists are employed in academic settings, community mental health centers, and private practice. Recent research tends to indicate that training in counseling and clinical psychology is very similar.

Developmental Psychology

Developmental psychologists study how we develop intellectually, socially, emotionally, and morally during our lifespan. Some focus on just one period of life (e.g., childhood or adolescence). Developmental psychologists usually do research and teach in academic settings, but many act as consultants to day-care centers, schools, or social service agencies.

Experimental Psychology

This area of specialization includes a diverse group of psychologists who do research in the most basic areas of psychology (e.g., learning, memory, attention, cognition, sensation, perception, motivation, and language). Sometimes their research is conducted with animals instead of humans. Most of these psychologists are faculty members at colleges and universities.

Educational Psychology

Educational psychologists are concerned with the study of human learning. They attempt to understand the basic aspects of learning, and then to develop materials and strategies for enhancing the learning process. For example, an educational psychologist might study reading and develop a new technique for teaching reading from the results of the research.

Social Psychology

Social psychologists study how our beliefs, feelings, and behaviors are affected by others. Some of the topics of interest to social psychologists are attitudes, aggression, prejudice, love, and interpersonal attraction. Most social psychologists are on the faculty of colleges and universities, but an increasing number are being hired by hospitals, federal agencies, and businesses to perform applied research.

School Psychology

School psychologists are involved in the development of children in educational settings. They are typically involved in the assessment of children and the recommendation of actions to facilitate students' learning. They often act as consultants to parents and administrators to optimize the learning environments of specific students.

Industrial/Organizational Psychology

Industrial/organizational (I/O) psychologists are primarily concerned with the relationships between people and their work environments. They may develop new ways to increase productivity or be involved in personnel selection. You can find I/O psychologists in businesses, industry, government agencies, and colleges and universities. I/O psychologists are probably the most highly paid psychologists.

Behavioral Neuroscience

Behavioral neuroscience is one of psychology's hottest areas because of the recent dramatic increase in interest in the physiological correlates of behavior. These psychologists study both very basic processes (e.g., how brain cells function) and more observable phenomena (e.g., behavior change as a function of drug use or the biological/genetic roots of psychiatric disorders). Some physiological psychologists continue their education in clinical areas and work with people who have neurological problems.

Environmental Psychology

Environmental psychologists are concerned with the relations between psychological processes and physical environments ranging from homes and offices to urban areas and regions. Environmental psychologists may do research on attitudes toward different environments, personal space, or the effects on productivity of different office designs.

Health Psychology

Health psychologists are concerned with psychology's contributions to the promotion and maintenance of good health and the prevention and treatment of illness. They design and conduct programs to help individuals stop smoking, lose weight, manage stress, prevent cavities, or stay physically fit. They are employed in hospitals, medical schools, rehabilitation centers, public health agencies, and private practice.

Family Psychology

Family psychologists are concerned with the prevention of family conflict, the treatment of marital and family problems, and the maintenance of normal family functioning. They design and conduct programs for marital enrichment, premarital preparation, and improved parent-child relations. They also conduct research on topics such as child abuse, family communications patterns, and the effects of divorce and remarriage. Family psychologists are often employed in medical schools, hospitals, community agencies, and private practice.

Rehabilitation Psychology

Rehabilitation psychologists work with people who have suffered physical deprivation or loss at birth or during later development as a result of damage or deterioration of function (e.g., resulting from a stroke). They help people overcome both the psychological and situational barriers to effective functioning in the world. Rehabilitation psychologists work in hospitals, rehabilitation centers, medical schools, and government rehabilitation agencies.

Psychometrics and Quantitative Psychology

Psychometric and quantitative psychologists are concerned with the methods and techniques used to acquire and apply psychological knowledge. A psychometrist revises old intelligence, personality, and aptitude tests and devises new ones. Quantitative psychologists assist researchers in psychology or other fields to design experiments or interpret their results. Psychometrists and quantitative psychologists are often employed in colleges and universities, testing companies, private research firms, and government agencies.

Psychology and the Law and Forensic Psychology

Psychology and the law studies legal issues from a psychological perspective (e.g., how juries decide cases) and psychological questions in a legal context (e.g., how jurors assign blame or responsibility for a crime). Forensic psychologists are concerned with the applied and clinical facets of the law such as determining a defendant's competence to stand trial or if an accident victim has suffered physical or neurological damage. Jobs in these areas are in law schools, research organizations, community mental health agencies, and correctional institutions.

Sport Psychology

Sport psychologists satisfy two needs within the athletic community. The first is to enhance the performance of athletes by mentally preparing them for competition and by improving athlete-coach relationships. The second is to explore the social and cultural contexts of sport such as gender biases, racism, stereotypes, and violence. Sport psychologists find employment as performance enhancement specialists with sports teams, as coaches at various athletic levels, and as university professors who teach and continue to investigate the process of sport through both quantitative and qualitative research.

In spite of the wide variety of choices available to you above, I know many of you will still approach graduate school with the idea that clinical psychology is the most desirable profession because your strongest value is to help others in need. For some of you, it may indeed be the right choice. For others, however, there are areas that would be a better match. Read the following article by Matthews (1994) with your own academic and personal profile in mind. Can you picture yourself helping others in one of these alternative fields?