Handbook for Psychology Majors

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Livingstone College
Congratulations! You have made an excellent choice to pursue an education in Psychology at Livingstone College. Our program has four full-time faculty and adjunct instructors (occasionally) who engage in both teaching and research in broad areas of Psychology. As Psychology majors, you benefit greatly from both the up-to-date content in courses and by getting involved in research, service learning, and internships for real hands-on learning experiences. Then there are your fellow students, numerous, inquisitive and informed, who are a great resource. However, remember, your education is only as good as you make it. Don’t sit back passively and absorb information; get involved with your education.

Some students begin their academic careers with a clear vision in mind which they carry throughout their undergraduate studies. For others, this vision changes as time passes. Many students, however, really don’t know what they want from their educational experiences; that’s okay too. It’s normal not to have all the answers. But it’s your responsibility to get the answers you need, and it’s your responsibility to find the assistance you need to get those answers. This handbook will give you suggestions about how to do this. It will also give suggestions about how to maximize your career options, while at the same time developing clear career goals.

The Livingstone College catalog states “Students who do not successfully pass PSY 130 Introduction to Psychology with a C or better after two attempts may not continue as intended psychology majors. Psychology majors must achieve a GPA of 2.25 in courses by the end of their fourth semester of full-time enrollment in order to continue in the major. No course grade below “C” will be accepted for any course specifically required, nor can any course be used to satisfy more than one requirement. Those students seeking a minor in Psychology must complete a minimum of 21 semester hours in Psychology, with no grade below “C.” PSY 130 and at least three courses above the 200 level are required.”

Goals of the Psychology Program

The Psychology major provides students with a foundation in the methodologies, research findings, and theories of contemporary psychology. Upon receipt of the Bachelors of Arts (B.A.) degree in Psychology, students are prepared for graduate study or employment in related and applied fields. The rigorous education of Psychology majors emphasizes: (a) committing students to a program designed to broaden and enrich their experiences; (b) challenging students to maximize their efforts and skills through a search for knowledge; (c) promoting student growth and development of a practical philosophy enabling students to apply moral and spiritual values to current problems and issues in a multicultural context, and (d) fostering the development of the total person by stressing the importance of achievement, leadership, and community service.

The goals of the Psychology program are as follows:

- to familiarize the student with a variety of content areas in preparation for graduate school
- to foster skills in designing and conducting research, and in analyzing and interpreting data
- to stimulate comprehension of psychological literature
- to create an awareness of ethical issues and guidelines
- to expose the student to issues of diversity in psychological theory, research, and practice

Choosing Courses

Course selection is of the utmost importance. Choosing the right courses can help to define your interests and goals, determine how long it will take you to graduate, and influence the position you are in after you graduate.
You should have a valid reason for each course you select. There are numerous strategies and resources you can use in this decision-making process. In addition to following the Psychology curriculum, when it is time for you to pick your courses, consider the content of a course. If you would like a quick summary of a course, consult your catalog. To find out details of what a course contains, check the syllabi for Psychology courses on file in the division office, located in the Price Administration Building, room 301 or ask faculty who have taught the course.

Schedule Adjustment

To make changes in your schedule, contact your advisor during the drop/add period at the beginning of each semester. If you want to add a class during the drop/add period, you must fill out the official drop/add form from the Registrar’s Office. To complete the process you must obtain the signature of your advisor and promptly return the completed form to the Registrar’s Office. Remember, class enrollment is on a first-come, first-served basis, so do not delay processing the form. If a desired class is closed, you may only enter the course by obtaining the permission and signature of the instructor. Classes dropped from your schedule during the drop/add period will not appear on your transcript.

If you withdraw from a course after the drop/add period, but before the date designated on the academic calendar as the last day to withdraw without penalty, a designation of “W” will appear on your transcript. During this period, you need only the approval of your advisor to withdraw from a course, but caution is advised because withdrawing from courses may delay your graduation and, if your number of current hours drops below 12 semester hours, it will mean you become a part-time student. Remember that educational loans, if you don’t have them already, may activate if you are not a full-time student. If you withdraw from a course after the date designated on the academic calendar as the last day to withdraw without penalty, your instructor will assign a grade of “WP” or “WF,” depending on your standing in the course at the time of withdrawal.

Designing Your Schedule

There are several principles that should guide your thoughts as you design your schedule. Although there will be considerable variation in how majors progress through their courses of study, you generally: (a) complete all general education requirements as early as possible, (b) take no upper level course until the junior year, (c) save free elective courses for your last two years, and (d) may use elective courses to provide a minor to augment your major.

Once you have a good idea of what type of courses you like, you may choose to narrow your study. Concentrating your course selection on a particular area of interest courses (perhaps a minor) will give you a better understanding of that topic. If you are planning to attend graduate school, this emphasis may give you an advantage. Establishing a focus by concentrating on a set of specific courses is very important. Also, look for complementary courses in content areas other than Psychology. For example, if your interest lies in Forensic Psychology, you can round out that knowledge with criminal justice classes. If your interest is in Industrial/Organizational Psychology, try taking some courses from the Division of Business.

Your suggested course sequence is contained in your catalog. Differences may exist among catalogs, so be sure that you refer to the correct catalog. Unless you had a gap in your first attendance at Livingstone of two or more semesters, the catalog you must satisfy is the one in effect when you first enrolled. The only exception to this is if you previously declared a major other than Psychology; the catalog in effect at the time you declared Psychology as your major sets the requirements to be met.
Independent Study

Psychology majors are allowed to take up to six hours of independent study. Independent study is an actual course for which you register. You can receive up to three hours a semester of course credit for doing research (discussed in the Research Experience section) or work on an independent project. For more information, see your advisor.

Research Experience

Research experience helps you go beyond what you learn in reading and lectures. You are able to address an area of interest in depth and learn first hand about the steps taken in research. Research experience is required for all psychology majors who present a mini-thesis to a committee of faculty members. Research experience strengthens graduate school and job applications. For graduate school, research can help generate good letters of recommendation, in addition to the experience and skills learned. To find research opportunities in an area you enjoy, talk to professors and read one or two of their papers.

Volunteer Experience

Volunteer experience, through service learning and/or community service, will help you gain a better understanding of course material while helping the community. This type of experience is also important for graduate school admissions and resumes. Volunteering will give you a taste of the professional world you will enter upon graduation and can help you decide on a career direction. If you are not interested in graduate school, volunteering adds to your job experience and can even sometimes lead to part-time or full-time work with a salary.

Advisement Issues

It is your responsibility to make sure you are on the right track toward meeting the requirements for your degree. However, your advisor is the right person from whom to get specific information about the Psychology course sequence and suggestions about how to optimize free electives to better prepare yourself for your future. You should initiate the scheduling of appointments, which should be spaced throughout the semester – not only during pre-registration. In order to better serve your needs, your advisor must be familiar with your individual needs and aspirations. Pre-registration is a hectic time for all involved and is a poor time to get acquainted. Besides, you should know what courses are needed prior to pre-registration. This is best accomplished early in the semester. Read your catalog before meeting with your advisor, so you can use the opportunity to ask your advisor for clarification of information not clear to you.

Occasionally problems can arise or personalities can conflict between a student and a professor. If you find yourself in this uncomfortable position, there is help available. Naturally, the first thing to do is to try to work out any differences with the professor. This can be intimidating sometimes. Remember, professors are people too. Talking about the problem may ease the tension for both of you. If that doesn’t work, you may want to contact the division chairperson. That person will help mediate the problem (after you have made a written statement of the problem) and will discuss it with both you and the professor, and try to resolve it.
Graduation Requirements

All psychology majors are required to prepare a mini-thesis. The mini-thesis is your research project combining the skills you’ve learned in PSY 230 Statistics, PSY 237 Research Methods, and PSY 433 Experimental Psychology. Psychology majors also must take the Psychology ACAT, an assessment of your general knowledge about the field over your years in school.

What You Can Do With a B.A. in Psychology?

Though acquiring a B.A. in Psychology does not allow you to call yourself a psychologist, there are many ways to apply what you have learned at the bachelor’s level.

Most students with a bachelor’s degree in Psychology will have obtained knowledge of human behavior and basic human relations skills, in addition to research and statistical skills. These skills offer you career versatility. Although it may be difficult to obtain a position directly related to Psychology without a graduate degree, some background in Psychology is useful and sometimes required for the broad employment areas of personnel, research, clinical settings, and social services. Companies hire psychology majors for a variety of positions (e.g. human resources).

For assistance with career planning and information concerning job opportunities, contact the Office of Career Services. Career Services will also provide assistance in writing resumes, interviewing for jobs, and determining what your interests might be.

Professors as a Career Counseling Resource

If you would like to gain insight into the different fields of Psychology or learn more about career options, talk with the Psychology faculty. They will be happy to answer any questions that you might have. Find out their office hours, and then stop by to see if they would be willing to answer a few questions. You might want to call them and set up an appointment.

Consulting a professor should be seen as a beginning: a way to develop your ideas and to pursue new directions. Professors are professionals who have dedicated their lives to the pursuit of knowledge. It would be helpful to know the area of expertise of various professors in order to take full advantage of the opportunities available on campus.

Fields Open to Graduates with a Bachelor’s Degree in Psychology

1. Administration and management
2. Business and industry
3. Casework
4. Child care
5. Employment interviewing
6. Gerontology
7. Health services
8. Law enforcement
9. Marketing and public relations
10. Personnel
11. Probation and parole
12. Psychiatric assisting
Thinking About Graduate School?

Many students see a need to continue their college education through graduate school. Admission to graduate programs is very competitive and you will need to be organized and thorough in approaching this daunting and critical task. Begin collecting information on graduate schools by the fall semester of your junior year. Be sure to obtain assistance from your faculty advisor. Here are a few things you need to know about what to look for in a graduate program.

First you will need to determine if you are going for a master’s or doctoral degree. Some programs have only the Ph.D., some only have a M.A. or M.S.; some have both. In general, it is more difficult to get into doctoral programs. The graduate school you select is very important; do not let the decision be made based on variables such as geography, climate or proximity to relatives. Your objective is to gain admission to the best possible school for you, regardless of location or any temporary hardship it might present.

**Master’s Degree (M.A./ M.S.)** A master’s degree in Psychology requires from one to three years of education after the bachelor’s degree. Individuals with a master’s degree in Psychology are capable of performing any of the jobs listed for the bachelor’s degree (with more responsibility) as well as conducting research or counseling. They may hold employment positions in settings such as schools, businesses, community mental health centers, and colleges. These individuals often work under the supervision of doctoral-level psychologists.

**Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)** This is a specialized degree that emphasizes research skills in your major. It takes approximately five to seven years after the bachelor’s degree or three to five years after the master’s degree.

**Doctor of Psychology (Psy.D)** The Psy. D degree is an alternative degree to the Ph.D. and takes about the same amount of time to be obtained. It is a specialized clinical degree that emphasizes clinical practice. This degree is relatively new and is meant only for the practicing psychologist.

As a graduate of the Psychology major at Livingstone College, you are not limited to any certain area. Indeed, you can prepare yourself, through proper course selection, research, and volunteer experience for any graduate program. You will need to research the proper program for you. The American Psychological Association (APA) publishes a manual on graduate programs in the U.S. and Canada. Other recommended books include “Insider’s Guide to Graduate Programs in Clinical and Counseling Psychology” by Norcross, Sayette, and Mayne, and “Getting In: A Step-By-Step Plan for Gaining Admission to Graduate School in Psychology” by the APA.

Based on conversations with your faculty advisor, contact graduate schools in your chosen specialty during the fall semester of your junior year and request information on admission procedures, applications and curriculums. Review the material closely to see if the program matches your academic and career goals. Make regular appointments with your faculty advisor to discuss the pros and cons of each program. Schedule visits to those programs that look most promising so that you can meet the faculty and interview several graduate students to find out what they think about the program.

Apply to several (probably ten) graduate schools and then, hopefully, you’ll have some choices. Most top-ranked programs provide financial aid in the form of out-of-state fee waivers, graduate assistantships, and
fellowships. Investigate all the possibilities and weigh these in making your decision. Check with your faculty advisor when making the final choice.

Entrance Requirements for Graduate School

Most graduate schools require a minimum of a 3.0 grade point average (GPA) and/or a 1000 on the Graduate Record Examination (GRE). In practice, those who are accepted generally have GPAs of 3.25 or better and GRE scores of 1100 or better. Clinical psychology programs are very competitive; GRE scores of 1300+ are routine and GPAs of 3.9 are common among those who are admitted.

Graduate Record Examination

The Graduate Record Examination (GRE) is an aptitude test evaluating knowledge and skills acquired during undergraduate studies. It yields verbal, quantitative, and analytic sub-scores, which many graduate programs weigh fairly heavily in making decisions about which applicants to admit. The GRE subject test in Psychology, which is also required for entry to some graduate programs, is designed to measure academic achievement specifically in Psychology. It would be beneficial to take the tests a year or so before graduation. Students receiving financial aid should contact the Financial Aid Office to check on the availability of a fee waiver for the first administration of the GRE. Detailed information about the GRE is available from your advisor or any member of the Psychology program faculty.

The GRE is given several times per year; check with the GRE website for dates. If you think you are weak in verbal or mathematics areas or do not take tests well, take the GRE in the summer before your junior year and find out how you did. If you did poorly, consider a refresher course and take it again.

Letters of Recommendation

You will need three letters of recommendation from professors who can vouch for your ability to do graduate work. To do this, you need to know a faculty member very well, so that the resulting letter has a personal tone of real knowledge of your potential. The best way to get to know faculty (and for them to learn of your potential) is to interact with them outside of the classroom. Your objective is to work with them on projects and show what you can do. Graduate schools want to know about your initiative, creativity, ability to work with others, and potential for research and scholarship. Make sure that you focus on these skills and demonstrate them at every opportunity.

Graduate schools in Psychology are very interested in your acquisition of a complete education. If you plan on taking time off before graduate school, it is suggested that you have your resume and any letters of recommendation written and on file at Career Services before you graduate from Livingstone College. Call Career Services for more details. Also, make sure your application is complete when you send it. It is also wise to apply as early as possible. The following link can assist you with further information about graduate school applications: https://www.apa.org/careers/resources/guides/grad-school.aspx

Subfields in Psychology

The general definition of psychology is that it is the study of the mind and human behavior. This definition encompasses many areas of psychology. Upon entering graduate school, you can specialize in one of the areas below:
Clinical Psychology
This area of psychology emphasizes the assessment and treatment of mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders. Clinical psychologists treat problems ranging from depression to schizophrenia among various populations.

Cognitive Psychology
This area of psychology is concerned with how people think and process information. Cognitive psychologists seek to understand language development, learning strategies, and decision making.

Counseling Psychology
This area of psychology focuses on enhancing coping strategies among individuals and families. Counseling psychologists consider the impact of the environment on a person’s psychological well-being.

Developmental Psychology
This area of psychology emphasizes changes in human behavior over the life span. While much of their research involves child development, developmental psychologists are becoming more interested in factors which impact the elderly.

Educational Psychology
This area of psychology is concerned with how to effectively teach and enhance learning environments for students. Educational psychologists consider student motivation and abilities to promote optimal student outcomes.

Experimental Psychology
This area of psychology focuses on the use of the scientific method to research a wide range of psychological phenomena, including comparative psychology (cross-species comparisons). Experimental psychologists conduct research involving quantitative methodologies.

Forensic Psychology
This area addresses how the law and psychology interact, by applying psychological principles to the law. Forensic psychologists often help judges determine which parent should have custody of a child, whether a defendant is fit to stand trial, and they also conduct research on jury behavior.

Health Psychology
This area specializes in how biological, psychological, and social factors influence health and illness. Health psychologists explore why people do not comply with doctors’ orders and how patients handle illness, as well as develop programs targeting substance abuse, obesity, and other unhealthy behaviors.

Human Factors/Engineering Psychology
This area of psychology emphasizes research in the relationship between people and their work with machines. Human Factors/Engineering psychologists consider issues such as reasonable workloads for people and how computers can be designed to prevent fatigue.

Industrial/Organizational Psychology
This area focuses on the interaction between business and psychology, by applying psychological principles to the workplace. Industrial/Organizational psychologists help organizations with hiring and staff development.

Neuropsychology
This area involves research on the relationship between brain systems and behavior. Neuropsychologists study how various diseases and injuries affect the brain, and use techniques such as PET and fMRI.
School Psychology
This area of psychology is concerned with assessing and counseling students in the school system. School psychologists conduct behavioral interventions and consult with school staff, as well as parents.

Social Psychology
This area of psychology focuses on how people interact in groups. Social psychologists conduct research in attitudes, beliefs, and discrimination, and seek to improve interactions among people.

Sports Psychology
This area of psychology addresses competitive goals among athletes. Sports psychologists work with athletes to enhance their ability to compete effectively.


Organizations in Psychology

Psychology Club
The Psychology Club is open to all students. The club allows its members to gain a sense of community with others in psychology, as well as identification with the discipline. It provides a forum for obtaining information about graduate programs and career development.

Solomon Carter Fuller Honor Society
The Solomon Carter Fuller Honor Society is named for the first Black psychiatrist in the United States, a graduate of Livingstone College, and recognizes psychology majors who strive to become scholar-activists. The organization encourages excellence by recognizing students who wish to make a significant contribution to the community. Students who have completed a number of credit hours in psychology, and have a psychology gpa of at least 3.0 are eligible to apply.

When to Start, What to Do: A Timeline for Success

Freshman/Sophomore Years

1. Work on your grades. Your ability to avoid distracters, manage your time, and keep your priorities straight at all times is crucial.
2. Take the right courses. Easy courses do not help you at all.
3. Volunteer to participate in research projects and community service that will give you research skills and build your interpersonal skills in working with others.

Junior Year

1. Choose a minor that will support your academic and professional goals. Consult with your faculty advisor about this.
2. Start contacting graduate programs to get applications, materials and information on course requirements. Consult with your faculty advisor about your choices.
3. Acquire and demonstrate as many research skills as possible. Consider working with faculty and presenting papers at conferences. This is a great way to gain research experience and possibly a publication.
4. Visit graduate programs to see how you like them.
5. Prepare a resume and critique it.
6. Continue to keep the pressure on for excellent grades.
7. Prepare for and take the GRE.

Senior Year

1. You will prepare your application in the fall semester of your senior year. Most graduate schools have a deadline in January or early February of your senior year.
2. Work carefully on your personal statement for your application.
3. Approach faculty for letters of recommendation. Provide them with your personal statement, resume, and forms, pre-stamped and addressed envelopes, and deadlines for each school.

Graduation Check List

- File an application for graduation with the Registrar’s Office by the date specified in the Academic Calendar (usually at the beginning of the fall semester of your senior year)
- Order cap and gown
- Meet with your advisor to make sure all requirements have been fulfilled (before end of drop/add period)
- Schedule and complete senior exit interview (about two weeks after filing graduation application)
- Check to see that your senior exit interview materials have been sent to the Registrar’s Office
- Order graduation announcements from the Livingstone College bookstore (optional)
- Take the Psychology ACAT (assessment test)
- Present your mini-thesis
- Arrange any necessary hotel accommodations and restaurant reservations early

The information provided here should not be used to replace advising. There is no substitute for proper advising for learning about academic requirements, career options, and graduate school. This handbook should be used as a guide. You may call 704-216-6917 if you have any questions about the Psychology program that have not been answered in the Handbook for Psychology Majors.
Psychology Majors Book List


