



❧ Psychology Major Handbook ❧

*A guide to making the most
out of your years at
Hunter College*

Updated Spring 2011

Psychology Major Handbook

Table of Contents

Note to Psychology Majors	3
Resources for Psychology Majors	4
Advising	4
Special Programs	4
BP ENDURE	4
Behavioral Neuroscience Concentration	4
MIDARP	5
Special Events	5
Departmental Lecture Series	5
Conferences	5
Internship Workshops	6
Psych Club and PSI CHI Events	6
Research Labs at Hunter	6
Finding a Lab	6
Approaching Professors	7
Typical Expectations of a Research Lab	8
Student Clubs	8
The “Psych Collective”	8
Psych News	9
Psych Club	9
PSI CHI	9
Becoming an Officer	10
Planning for the Future – Beyond the BA	10
Career Options with a Bachelor’s Degree in Psychology	11
Pursuing Graduate Study in Psychology	12
What Students Should be doing as Undergrads	13
Coursework	13
Narrowing Down Your Interests	15
Acquiring Research Experience	16
Internships	16
Networking	17
Applying to Graduate School in Psychology	18
Things to Consider	18
Typical Requirements	20
Goodness of Fit	22
Becoming an Attractive Candidate	22
Complete an Honors Thesis	22
Show Statistics Proficiency	23
Present Your Work at Conferences	23
Publish Your Work	24
Gain Teaching Experience	24

🌀Note to Psychology Majors🌀

Congratulations on declaring your Psychology Major! An exciting new chapter of your life is about to start, as you begin your journey in the field of psychology.

Most students do not know exactly what to expect when they declare their psychology major. This handbook is meant to give you basic information so that you can make the most out of your years at Hunter, and take advantage of numerous opportunities that will help you excel in your career – whether you decide to join the workforce immediately after graduation, or whether you chose to pursue graduate study towards an advanced degree.

The information presented here has been compiled by officers of the Psychology Collective at Hunter. As students, we know how frustrating it can be to navigate the complex universe of academic resources. Also, we continuously hear from other psych majors in their last semesters at Hunter that they wish they had known in advance the many requirements to be met, and the necessary work to be done in order to become a competitive candidate for a graduate program.

Our main goal in creating this handbook is for students to be aware of these requirements as early in their major as possible, so that they can plan in advance, and partake in valuable experiences before they graduate.

We hope that this humble contribution will encourage students to strive for excellence in their undergraduate years, which will better their individual prospects, as well as the larger psychology community at Hunter College.

Good Luck!

Psych Collective
Officers
Spring 2011

DISCLAIMER: "This document was created and will be updated by the student officers of the Hunter College Chapter of Psi Chi and the Hunter Psychology Club). The Psychology Department does not accept responsibility for any errors in this document. Student suggestions and comments are welcome and should be sent to jason.young@hunter.cuny.edu."

Resources for Psychology Majors

Advising

The CUNY Hunter Psychology Department offers advising in room 611N on a walk-in basis. Weekly advising schedules can be found on the Psychology Department website (www.hunter.cuny.edu/psychology) and any questions can be e-mailed to: psychadv@hunter.cuny.edu.

~REMEMBER TO BRING YOUR UNOFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT TO ALL ADVISING SESSIONS~

Advising is helpful for:

- Deciding what classes to take
- Over-tallying into classes
- Finding out major and minor requirements
- Requesting special permission to register for classes
- Any general questions related to any of the psychology courses

Special Programs

BP – ENDURE

This program is designed to encourage and prepare undergraduate students from diverse backgrounds to enter into and succeed in PhD programs in the neurosciences. The program has partnered with other institutions to enrich students' experiences. Throughout the year, students conduct research at Hunter or NYU. During the summer, students are placed at NYU, Brown University, University of Michigan, or Vanderbilt University. BP-ENDURE students get a monthly stipend and health benefits.

Eligible students are those from any relevant major who are from federally underrepresented groups, who are socially, culturally, or economically disadvantaged, or who have a disability, and who wish to pursue a Ph.D. program in a neuroscience-related discipline. Undergraduate sophomores and juniors with strong interest in and commitment to conducting intensive neuroscience research can apply.

Further Information and application can be obtained through website: www.bpendurehunternyu.info or by email: bpendure@hunter.cuny.edu

Behavioral Neuroscience Concentration

The Behavioral Neuroscience Concentration is an interdisciplinary training program for students preparing for academic or professional careers in neuroscience and related areas. The concentration combines students from both psychology and biology in a set of core courses, and provides mentored research experience in faculty laboratories, opportunities for student research presentations, and talks by notable neuroscientists. This program is a particularly great option for students who are planning to

continue graduate study in neuroscience and related fields, or to attend medical school for neurology, neurosurgery, or psychiatry specialties.

In addition to completing a research project, students in the Behavioral Neuroscience Concentration will also be enrolled in the Departmental Honors Program and will graduate with Departmental Honors.

Because of the large number of required courses in the Concentration, it is very important that interested students meet with the Concentration Advisor as early in their College career as possible—no later than the start of their Sophomore year.

The MIDARP Program (Minority Institutional Drug Abuse Research Development Program)

The objective of MIDAR is to develop support drug abuse research at Hunter College. The program especially aims to provide research experience to minority students, by providing underrepresented minority students with knowledge on drug abuse research, and helping to develop skills by conducting research projects and other professional development activities.

MIDARP also encourages minority students to pursue careers in drug abuse research and provide them with educational support and research experiences.

Talk to your psychology advisor about this program and seek information on how to apply.

Special Events

Departmental Lecture Series

Every semester, the Psychology Department offers lectures by its faculty as well as invited speakers from other schools and institutions. Students are strongly encouraged to attend these lectures. Aside from learning new information about the topic they are interested in (information that is usually not offered in regular courses) students also get the opportunity to meet professors who are professionals in the fields they are interested in. This will allow them to expand their professional networks, and perhaps land them a spot working in a laboratory, researching what they are interested in.

Conferences

There are numerous local, regional and national psychology conferences and conventions that students are able to attend. Doing so offers a great opportunity to learn more about varied topics, to discover your main interest in psychology, and to network with faculty and professionals in the field.

Every Spring, the **Annual Hunter College Psychology Convention** is held jointly with the annual meeting of the North East Undergraduate Research Organization for Neuroscience (N.E.U.R.O.N.) This is a great opportunity for Hunter students to present their work, or simply attend to learn about the research conducted at Hunter in the various labs, as well as in schools from all over the North East.

The American Psychological Association and the American Psychological Society also hold annual conventions in which student affiliates are able to present their work. The International Honors Society

in Psychology (Psi Chi) also holds regional conferences/meetings and awards certificates to members who present their papers. It is important to attend these conferences in order to network and make professional contacts with experts in the field you are interested in.

In order to find out about these opportunities, check websites such as:

- www.psichi.org
- www.apa.org
- www.aps.org
- www.epa.org

Internship Workshops

These events are offered almost every semester, to teach students the importance of internships and how to find one. Very often, information on specific opportunities is given out as well.

Different groups within Hunter host these workshops throughout the year:

- The Psychology Department
- Career Development Services (www.hunter.cuny.edu/studentservices/cds)
- Psych Club and Psi Chi

Information about these events is usually disseminated via email (contact the Department to subscribe to Psych-I, the departmental listserv) and fliers, or can be found in the Hunter website.

Psych Club and PSI CHI Events

Throughout the year, the student clubs at Hunter organize events that are relevant to psych majors, such as Internship Workshops (mentioned earlier), Graduate School Workshops, Invited Speakers series, Psychology Movie Night, Faculty/Student Socials, etc.

These events are great opportunities for you to meet other students with similar interests, to network with professors and learn about the work they do outside the classroom, and to find out valuable information for applying to grad school, finding internships, etc.

To learn about these events, make sure you subscribe to Psych-L (the departmental listserv). You can also email the clubs' faculty advisor, Professor Jason Young (Jason.young@hunter.cuny.edu), asking him about these events.

Research Labs at Hunter

Finding a Lab

Getting research experience is crucial if you are serious about Graduate School in Psychology. Programs in every field of psychology (perhaps Psy.D. programs are the exception) expect applicants to have research experience, including Clinical, Social, and Counseling programs. By participating in research you will gain valuable skills that you will need in the future.

Research labs at Hunter are very competitive, and students often find it hard to get in. The reality is there are many psychology majors, and only so many labs.

To learn about the different Labs at Hunter, visit the Psychology Department's website. Look in the faculty listings (www.hunter.cuny.edu/psychology/faculty), and you will find links to different research labs. These pages may contain information for applicants, such as requirements, workload, and minimum time commitment expected. Contact the faculty for more information, or if you think you want to apply for a position, ask if there are any openings.

You can also learn about research opportunities by attending events organized by the Department or by the student clubs, Psi Chi and Psych Club. For example, these clubs often host Student/Faculty Socials, which are a great opportunity to network and hear about different research labs at Hunter.

Don't hesitate on talking to an Advisor at the Psychology Department for assistance finding a lab. Tell them what you are interested in, and ask if they know of any openings. They will be glad to help you, and are very knowledgeable of the different research projects going on at Hunter.

Approaching Professors

Whether you are interested in joining a research lab, or whether you are contacting a Professor to ask about a mentorship opportunity, it is generally fine to approach them via email. Make sure you keep a polite and concise tone. Your email should stand out in a good way. Convey to them why you are interested in their research. Professors prefer to work with students who are genuinely interested in their research, but they don't expect you to be an expert in the field.

When you contact Faculty via email, make sure you request to meet them in person to further discuss any opportunities available. If you are taking a class with the Professor and know his or her office hours, you may want to drop by and talk to them in person. This is a chance to discuss face to face the opportunity to join a research project.

It may occasionally happen that professors do not reply to your emails. Don't take this personally. Professors receive hundreds of emails every day. Follow up with them. Ask politely whether they've had a chance to look at the email you sent them regarding their lab.

You may find that there are no openings at a given Lab. Just contact another Professor. Make sure you do your homework, though. Don't contact random labs, on areas that don't particularly interest you and you don't know much about. Working at a lab is a hard and serious job, and you will make the most out of it if you join a project you are genuinely interested in.

Also, don't forget that Lab positions are very coveted, and many students are competing for few positions. Professors prefer to work with students with a passion for the subject, so it is essential that you convey to them why you want to work at their lab. You need to nourish the ability to speak (or write) articulately about what you have read and about what interests you. One of the worst things you can say to a professor is: "They did that study..." or "I read this thing where these people proved that..."

If you are able to write down and remember one of the authors names or the journal in which it appeared, and if you can explain in a sentence the finding that interest you, you will get SO many more points, and will be considered a student with whom the professor would want to work.

Typical Expectations of a Research Lab

Research in a lab involves a lot work, but is an excellent way to gain experience. Getting involved in research provides students with an opportunity to gain a great set of skills.

Working in a psychology lab requires commitment and a motivation to learn. Previous academic achievement and the ability to commit several hours per week (typically around 10 hours/week) to lab work are some of the requirements for a good research assistant candidate. In addition, students are also expected to complete reports at the end of their research experience.

Although not required by all labs, knowledge of statistics and research methods are usually preferable. You will have more chance to enter a lab if you have already taken PSYC248 and PSYC249/250. This is a reason for taking these courses as early in your major as possible.

Some of the main skills students can expect to develop by working at a lab include testing hypotheses, testing and observing research participants, refining methods, analyzing data, and understanding the implications of the data. Research experience is a learning opportunity that helps to enhance classroom knowledge, find the kinds of problems that often arise in psychological research, and help to acquire new skills that are useful for approaching issues in a systematical way.

Student Clubs

The “PSYCH COLLECTIVE”

“The Psychology Collective” is a collaboration between the three psychology-related student organizations at Hunter College: The Psychology Club, The Hunter College Chapter of Psi Chi - The International Honor Society in Psychology, and Psych News, the undergraduate semesterly newsletter. The purpose of the Psych Collective is to maintain, encourage, and enhance students’ interest in psychology, and aid members, especially those who plan to advance in the field of psychology, with the knowledge of all psychology specializations.

The hard work of the psychology student clubs culminates every year with the **Annual Hunter College Psychology Convention**, a major event organized by the officers of the three clubs, in which all psychology majors are encouraged to participate as volunteers, attendees, and presenters.

PSYCH NEWS

The official newsletter of the Psychology Collective. Its purpose is to provide students, especially Psychology students, with the opportunity to research and write about the topics within psychology that interest them, and to educate and inform the Hunter College community about various topics of interest for undergraduates' psychological well-being.

Psych News is a great opportunity to get your work published, and to acquire an additional listing on your resume, CV, or graduate school applications.

PSYCH CLUB

Psych Club is open to psychology majors and non-majors alike. To become a member of Psych Club one does not need to fulfill any requirements, one must merely express an interest in the field of psychology. This is precisely what makes Psych Club a great place for students to start planning their futures. Psych Club is dedicated to establishing connections between students, researchers, clinicians, and professors in the field of psychology, and works hard to prepare students for applying to and gaining entry to graduate programs.

Overall, the Psychology Club strives to cultivate and spread knowledge in the field of psychology throughout our community by educating them about issues that affect them such as stress, and financial problems.

PSI CHI

The Hunter College Chapter of the International Honor Society in Psychology. Founded in 1929, Psi Chi's mission is to encourage, stimulate, and maintain excellence in scholarship and advancement in the field of psychology. Membership is open to graduate and undergraduate students whose major interest is in psychology and who meet minimum qualifications. Membership in Psi Chi is an honor which is for life. Benefits of membership include being a part of the oldest Psychology Honorary group in the country; becoming a part of an active group here at Hunter; as well as eligibility for scholarships, grants and national convention opportunities open only to Psi Chi members. A permanent record of your membership is preserved at the Psi Chi National Office, and may be used for reference purposed such as applications for graduate school, scholarships, and employment. For more information, see the Psi Chi website at www.psichi.org.

Membership Requirements:

Undergraduate:

- Registration for major in Psychology
- Completion of 3 semesters or 5 quarters of the college course
- Must have completed a minimum of 9 credits in 200-level or above Psychology courses taken at Hunter College

- Must have a minimum GPA of 3.0 and a minimum GPA of 3.5 in all Psychology courses taken here at Hunter College

Graduate Students:

- Registration for major or minor standing in Psychology (or for a program psychological in nature)
- A minimum overall cumulative GPA of 3.0 on a 4-point scale in all graduate courses

➤ *Throughout the year, Psych Club and Psi Chi host joint events, ranging from workshops to field trips, which aim at informing students of the opportunities available to psychology majors, and guiding them along the process of fulfilling their educational requirements, applying for internships, finding research experience and, ultimately, applying to graduate school. These events also present a great opportunity for students to start networking. Aside from meeting fellow students with similar interests, students are also given a chance to get to know their professors and to interact with them outside the classroom setting. Moreover, because the Psych Collective often invites speakers from other colleges and institutions, by attending these events students will be able to further expand their networks. To learn about these events, make sure you subscribe to the Psychology Department's listserv. You can also send an email to psychcollective@gmail.com to receive notifications and event invitations.*

Becoming an Officer

As an Officer in a club such as Psych Club, Psi Chi or Psych News, you gain organizational, time-management and teamwork skills for the future. Leadership experience is an asset that many graduate programs look for on resumes. Officers gain leadership experience and demonstrate professionalism, responsibility and reliability.

Also, as an officer you will have the opportunity to work and establish close relationships with a team of students that are passionate about psychology like you, and share many of your interests. Finally, officers often get to interact with professors outside the classroom at various events, which gives them great opportunities for networking.

Openings are usually announced via email – make sure you subscribe to the departmental listserv, Psych-I. You can also contact the clubs' faculty advisor, Professor Jason Young (Jason.young@hunter.cuny.edu) if you are interested in becoming an officer.

Planning for the Future – Beyond the BA

Many students declare their major in psychology without a clear sense of what they want to do in the future. This is perfectly normal, and you should use your years at Hunter to discover the career path that is best for you.

This being said, depending on what you plan to do after graduation, you should use your undergraduate years to develop skills in certain areas, and acquire the necessary credentials that will allow you to achieve your goals.

Most of the work you should do if you aspire to go to graduate school will also help you land a better job if you decide to enter the workforce directly after graduation. As a general recommendation, it may be wise to behave as though you were going to grad school, and take the necessary steps towards that goal. If later on you decide that graduate school is not for you, you will still be able to take advantage of the valuable skills you can acquire via research experiences and internships.

The opposite may be quite hard to accomplish. If you decide in your senior year that you want to apply for a doctoral program, you may discover that you don't have the necessary experience, and you don't have much time left to acquire it. Whenever this happens, students may opt to delay their graduation (staying in school longer to complete research work, for example), or they may apply to a Masters program in general psychology, as a way of getting the necessary research experience to be accepted into a doctorate program later on.

Career Options with a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology

While the Ph.D. and Psy.D. remain the only degrees with which one can enter professional positions labeled "Psychologist," over the past few years an increasing number of students at the bachelor's degree level have found stimulating and interesting career opportunities in numerous fields, many utilizing their interests and knowledge of human behavior gained through psychology course work.

Many students graduating with a bachelor's degree will work in some division of human or social services. Some common job titles in the area include:

- Case Management
- Career Counselor
- Rehabilitation Specialist
- Psychiatric Technician

Some important skills for those working in this area include the ability to assess client needs, keep thorough and accurate records, express care and empathy and act as an advocate for your client.

In addition to social services, a bachelor's in psychology can provide excellent training for many other types of jobs. Some of the most important things you will learn during your undergraduate years are interpersonal skills. Your understanding of the human mind and behavior will make you a good candidate for jobs that require good communication skills. Some example jobs in this area include those in sales, marketing, case management and social services.

As an undergraduate, you will also do a considerable amount of research and writing. These skills would be useful in many jobs such as a data analyst, library assistant, probation officer, business manager, case worker and many others.

When searching for your first post-graduation job, be sure to consider all of the skills you have acquired during your time as a student. Make a list of things you learned in various classes to help you assess your skills and talents in order to find a job best suited to your educational background and professional goals.

Pursuing Graduate Study in Psychology

Psychology graduate programs vary widely depending upon the type of degree, area of study and intended career goals. For example, a program might be focused on a specific sub-discipline such as social psychology, educational psychology or clinical psychology. Each program offers an education uniquely tailored to providing knowledge and skills in a particular area of interest.

Masters Programs

A Master of Arts degree is a two-year program that can be focused on a particular area of interest (this is most often the case with terminal MAs), or they may be general psychology programs. The latter are often pursued as stepping stones towards a Doctoral program.

Those who do not pursue the doctoral degree will find that there are many jobs in the psychological field that they are qualified for, including work as a psychology assistant or counselor in a group home or special education setting.

Masters programs typically have a research component, but depending on the program the emphasis on research will be typically much less than that of a Doctoral degree. Furthermore, Master programs do not typically offer comprehensive funding to those accepted, and are normally funded directly by the students themselves.

Ph.D. Programs

The Ph.D. is the oldest doctorate program and the most well-known. It usually takes around five to seven years to complete, and it is very competitive to get in (most have an acceptance rate around 11%-15%) Many individuals who wish to serve in the academic world choose to obtain the Ph.D.; people such as university professors for example. Other career options include full-time researcher and therapist.

The Ph.D. offers the most flexibility in terms of employment and career choices. Ph.D.'s are endorsed by the American Psychological Association, and you can obtain licensure as a psychologist in all states with this type of degree.

Because they typically require an intense workload in terms of research fellowships and teaching assistantships, most Ph.D.'s are fully funded.

Psy.D. Programs

Psy.D. stands for Doctorate in Psychology. This is a newer degree that takes around four to six years to complete (slightly shorter than the PhD). Also, Psy.D. programs don't have an emphasis on research like Ph.D.'s usually do, but instead focus more on the clinical/practitioner aspect of psychology.

Individuals with this type of degree mostly pursue careers in clinical settings such as mental institutions, family therapy clinics, and hospitals. While those with this type of degree can be hired in the academic world, the Ph.D. is typically preferred for academic positions.

Psy.D. programs have a 40%-41% percent acceptance rate, and students receive little funding for fellowships or assistantships. More than 30 programs are now approved and endorsed by the APA across the United States, and you can become a licensed Psychologist in all states with the Psy.D.

🌀What Students Should be doing as Undergrads🌀

As you probably realized already, there is more to being a psych major than meets the eye. There is so much that you should try to accomplish during your undergraduate years, the task can be quite daunting. Don't panic! Here we have included some of the work you may want to focus on while you prepare for the future. For a more comprehensive account and a myriad of valuable advice, we strongly encourage you to check Silvia, Delaney and Marcovitch's ***What Psychology Majors Could (and Should) Be Doing: An Informal Guide to Research and Professional Skills***.

Here, we present some ways for you to make the most of your years as a Psychology Major:

Coursework

In general, doctoral programs want to see that applicants have taken a variety of courses in psychology, and that they have taken classes in statistics and research methods. Depending on the program of your interest, you will see that they also prefer students who have taken certain key courses. For example, certain programs in Clinical Psychology may prefer or even require applicants who have taken Physiological Psychology. Learning the course requirements of the programs that you may want to apply to could guide you when registering for classes during your undergraduate years.

Psychology Majors at Hunter are required to take two core courses, Statistical Methods (PSYC248) and Experimental Psychology (PSYC249 or PSYC250). These two classes are a pre-requisite for many other courses, so you may want to take them as soon as you declare the major.

Psychology Majors also need to take one course in each of four different content areas. At the 200-level, these courses offer an introduction to varied fields within psychology, for example, Social Psychology (PSYC230). 300-level courses are more advanced and typically have requirements, like Sensation and Perception (PSYC301). Other elective courses are also available, both at the 200- and 300- level.

Taking many classes in different areas within psychology will give you a broad overview of the field, and will allow you to discover what interests you the most. Exposing yourself to as many areas in psychology as possible will also increase your general knowledge and help you when taking the subject GRE, which many doctoral programs require.

You will see that every semester there are many Special Topics classes being offered. These are advanced seminars that go in depth into a particular topic, for example, “Attitudes and Attitude Change.” Taking these classes may be a good idea to further explore a topic that already interests you.

There are also many classes that give you the opportunity to have a hands-on experience by doing research, literature reviews, working at a field placement, or tutoring other students. These experiences will help you define what you want to do, and will also look impressive to a Graduate School board of admissions.

PSYC201 – Independent Study in Psychology – Work with a faculty member at their lab or on an individual project. You can also use this class to do an internship for credit. A written report is required at the end of the semester.

PSYC306/307 – Seminar in Psychological Services I & II – Seminar and one day per week placement in a mental health/community service setting. You can take one or both classes. These classes offer a very valuable experience, particularly if you are interested in Clinical or Counseling Psychology.

PSYC348 – Statistical Tutoring – In this class, you will attend a weekly seminar, and work as a teacher assistant for Statistical Methods (PSYC248). You will grade materials and tutor PSYC248 students. Taking this class is a great way to gain teaching experience, and to polish your SPSS skills. Open only to students with an A in PSYC248.

PSYC395 – Independent Research in Psychology – Similar to PSYC201, only you are expected to do more advanced research work. Internships at field placements cannot be granted credit through this course. By the end of the semester, you are expected to submit an APA-style research report or literature review.

PSYC396/398 – Honors in Psychology – These courses are open for students with a 3.5 psychology GPA and 3.0 general GPA, or higher. You will attend a weekly seminar, and work on an independent research project with a mentor, who will typically be the head of the lab where you work, or a faculty mentor with similar interests. Most students take two semesters in completing their projects, but in rare cases this can be accomplished in one. An APA-Style report is required by the end of the project.

- *Keep in mind that registering for any of these special courses requires that you pay a visit to the Psychology Department and speak with an advisor. You need to be approved before you can actually register for these classes, so plan in advance and start making arrangements at least 1 or 2 months before registration.*

Narrowing Down Your Interests

As an Undergraduate, it is expected that you will use your time in school to take some basic courses on research methods and statistical analysis, and that you will take a number of content courses on a variety of areas that should give you a broad overview of the field of psychology and its many sub-fields. This much is covered by the requirements of the Psych Major.

But you should also use this time to discover your main interests in psychology. There are many sub-fields that you may want to explore. By the time you approach your senior year, you need to be able to answer the questions, What sort of career do I want to have? In what area of Psychology? When applying to Graduate School, you will see that most doctoral programs prefer candidates with specific career goals, and with a clear idea of what they want to study. If you don't know what you want to do, you will have a hard time finding a program that fits you.

A great way of discovering where your interests lie is by exposing yourself. Attend conferences and lectures that will give you a chance to learn about subjects more in depth. Another great idea is to take as many psychology courses as you can, in different areas. This will give you an overview and expose you to issues that you may want to explore further on your own.

When something you learn in class is particularly interesting to you, ask your professor for relevant articles that you may consult for further reading, or do your own literature review on the topic. The importance of reading can't be stressed enough! It doesn't have to be only journal articles (because these are often quite difficult), but the great thing about psychology is that there are a number of "popular" writers who have made psychological concepts more accessible to the public. Reading some of these pieces might get you excited about an aspect of psychology, or it could help you figure out which area of psychology you would most like to pursue. Some examples/suggestions include:

- Malcolm Gladwell: Blink, Outliers
- Jonah Lehrer: How we decide
- Oliver Sacks: The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat
- Shannon Moffett: The Three Pound Enigma

Once you have identified your main area of interest, you can do an independent study (PSYC201) or an independent research project (PSYC395). These courses give you the opportunity to either work for a semester at a research lab on a project related to your interests, or to do an in-depth literature review on a subject of your choice. Use these courses to demonstrate knowledge and experience in a given topic or area, and also to test whether you are truly interested in this subject and want to investigate it further.

Acquiring Research Experience

Research is a key aspect of a career in psychology. As a graduate student, you will be required to conduct research on a regular basis. Therefore, schools prefer applicants who already have the basic skills and knowledge, and who enjoy doing research.

As an undergrad, you have many opportunities to participate in research projects. The psychology major requires you to take classes like PSYC248/249/250, which are designed to give you an overview of statistical techniques and research methods. This bit of experience may not take you too far, but it will give you some skills that can help you get into a research lab.

You can look up the faculty listings in the Psychology Department's website, see what projects are being conducted, and contact the professors that you are mostly interested in. Ask if there is an opening at their lab. You will find more information about Research Labs later in this handbook.

Most students approach professors only by the time they need to find an Honors Thesis mentor. This is fine, obviously, but don't think you absolutely can't do anything before your Honors project. You can approach a professor and ask them to mentor you on a smaller project, perhaps culminating with a poster presentation at the **Annual Hunter College Psychology Convention**, for example. This is also a good way to "test" a potential mentor, see if you work well together before you ask them to commit to help you with an Honors Thesis.

Finally, internships or volunteer positions at research institutions can give you an invaluable experience. You will find more information about internships elsewhere in this handbook, but keep in mind that Internships are not only meant to give you field experience in a mental health setting, but they can also be a great way to gain research experience.

Internships

An internship gives you an opportunity to immerse yourself in a field and learn beyond the classroom whether this is the right career path for you. For example, one who is interested in clinical psychology would seek an internship in a psychiatric/psychological clinic or hospital. When working on an internship, the intern works closely with a professional, which is an excellent way of learning valuable skills, as well as developing a relationship with a potential letter writer.

It is important to have at least one internship as an undergraduate, because internships allow the student to narrow down their interests, and help them decide what area of psychology they want to focus on. For example, how would you know for sure that you want to pursue a career in developmental psychology, if you never have the opportunity to work with children? Doing an internship working with children may be an excellent way of testing this particular interest.

Furthermore, internships grant valuable experience in the field. For example, working as an intern in a research center will teach you how a lab runs and increase your research skills. And, aside from personal experience, internships form a network for the student, and if the internship is successful, those with

whom the student worked could be potential sources of recommendation for Graduate school, other internships, and jobs.

Hospitals, mental health institutions and research centers are excellent places to seek internships, and many have stable internship programs that are designed to provide students with considerable experience. You can find out about these opportunities by doing your own search online (on websites such as www.idealists.org), by making an appointment at Career Development Services to ask about internship opportunities for Hunter Students, and by subscribing to the Psychology Department's listserv (contact the advisors for more information about this.) There are different ways to get credit for internship work, see the section on Coursework for a detailed description.

- ***It is important to note that clerical positions, such as working at the front desk or filing documents are NOT considered valuable intern work. The organization granting the internship needs to provide valuable field experience to the intern.***

Networking

These days it is often said that what matters is not “what you know, it’s who you know.” Naturally, this applies to the field of psychology as well. Although there is no doubt that the knowledge students gain in the classroom is of great significance (i.e., GPA plays an important role), there are other crucial factors that admission boards look at when reviewing a student’s application; one of such factors are the applicant’s letters of recommendation.

Students not interested in pursuing graduate studies will also benefit greatly from networking successfully in their undergraduate years. Those you work with during this time may offer recommendations for future employers. They may know of relevant job opportunities and share that information with you, and one day they may even become your employers themselves!

In order for a student to obtain a good letter of recommendation, he/she must get to know professors and work closely with them, as well as other professionals in the field. Certainly it is hard for a professor to get to know students well in a crowded classroom or lecture hall. This is where the student needs to take the initiative and develop professional relationships with instructors. A good place to start is by showing an interest in the subject: not merely reading the textbook and learning the material, but also speaking up in class, asking questions and going to the professors’ office hours; this will already set you apart from the other students in class.

A further step would be expressing an interest in the professor’s work: inquiring into the research that they do, reading their articles and - if there is a spot open in their lab - volunteering to work for them (in Hunter College, one can even get class credit for such work, by taking Psych 201 and/or Psych 395). All this will allow the professor (and potential letter writer) to learn about the student’s interests, abilities and skills - all of which will contribute to a good letter of recommendation.

Professionals in the field know other professionals, and even if a student is not interested in the research a particular professor is conducting, that professor might introduce them to or recommend them to other professionals with compatible interests.

Of course, the classroom is not the only place where a student should seek out relationships. Students should also take the initiative by attending conventions, conferences and lectures that are of particular interest to them. Talking to the presenters, asking them questions about their research, getting their contact information and keeping in touch with them - doing this will expand your professional network, and consequently will lead you to obtain strong letters of recommendation, which will set you apart from other students and help you get into the graduate school of your choice.

✧Applying to Graduate School in Psychology✧

Things to Consider

When researching graduate schools, students should take into consideration several issues to select a program.

I. Research Interests

Research is an integral part of most graduate school programs, and students will want to determine their area of concentration and research interests before selecting schools. The area of concentration will be the subject area of psychology you are most interested in (e.g. clinical psychology, social psychology, neuropsychology, etc.) Review the web sites of these programs and read the descriptions of the psychology faculty members in each department.

It is important to ask yourself if the faculty members are exploring questions that excite you, or that you can envision yourself researching. Consider the methods and theoretical orientations in your evaluation of the faculty. A helpful resource can be the Council on Undergraduate Research registry of undergraduate researchers and graduate schools. This website can match undergraduate students with graduate programs and faculty interested in recruiting students with research experience. The most important part of your analysis is to find a *good match* with faculty exploring your areas of interest. Applying to a program that closely matches your interests and experience will increase your chances of getting accepted.

II. Prestige and Accreditation

It is important for students to understand that prestigious Psychology programs are housed in very prestigious and not-so-prestigious schools alike. In other words, it is the prestige of the particular program you are applying to that matters, more so than the general prestige of the school housing such program.

The prestige of a particular program can be judged in several ways. One way is through accreditation. There are two primary types of accreditation, institutional and program specific. Graduate institutions

that are institutionally accredited have met certain standards for quality of education. Institutional accreditation assures the student that licensing boards, certifying organizations and insurance companies will recognize a degree from the school. Program specific accreditation, performed by the American Psychological Association, is voluntary and does not apply to Masters programs. The programs that are APA accredited may be preferred, as they are regularly evaluated for their curricula, resources and educational outcomes. However, it is possible that a high quality school opted out of the process.

Another way to determine the prestige of a graduate school program is by obtaining their rank on the U.S. New and World Report listings of graduate schools.

III. Financial Aid and Funding Opportunities

An important point to consider when determining what schools to apply to is financial aid. Graduate students have a multitude of academic expenses including tuition, fees, supplies and books, but they also incur the costs of living such as food, clothing, rent, transportation and health.

As a general rule, most PhD. programs will provide a package of funding to all accepted students, including tuition waivers and income perceived in exchange for work as a research or teacher assistant. Other sources of funding commonly offered include fellowships, grants, and other merit-based scholarships. Psy.D. and Masters programs typically do not offer these comprehensive funding packages. You can easily learn about the financial aid offered to students by different programs by visiting their websites.

Other opportunities to acquire financial aid are available through external organizations. Philanthropic, private and public organizations offer various scholarships and fellowships. Federal funds can also be sought out from organizations such as the National Institute of Mental Health, the National Institute on Drug Abuse, and the National Science Foundation, which offer research grants and fellowships. There are several resources available to students searching for funding opportunities:

- Princeton Review's *Paying for Graduate School Without Going Broke*
- *Financing Graduate School* by Patricia McWade
- www.petersons.com/finaid
- www.scholarships.com
- www.finaid.org/otheraid
- www.gradview.com/financialaid

Another option, that may be less appealing because it has to be repaid, is the student loan. There are many different federal loans and student loan programs available with decent interest rates. Be sure to file a FAFSA to determine eligibility for loans such as Stafford Loans and Graduate PLUS loans. Certain federal agencies are also offering loan forgiveness or repayment programs such as the NIH Loan Repayment Program.

III. Location and Quality of Life

When researching graduate schools it is also important to factor in personal necessities that create a high quality of life. Geographical location may be more important to some than others, but students should remember that it has an influence on training issues and costs of living. If you are particularly interested in research about a specific population, the environment may be an important factor. The factors that determine the quality of life are individual, and the internet is a useful resource for “exploring” the locations of the programs you are looking into.

As a general rule, your chances of acceptance will decrease if you apply solely to schools within a very popular urban center (such as New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles, etc). The good news is that great programs can be found throughout the country. You will greatly increase your prospects of getting into a program if you expand your selection of schools to include both rural and urban school settings.

IV. Miscellaneous

There are several other factors students may want to take into consideration when applying to graduate schools. One factor may be the facilities available to the school, such as the library, the research space and the ability to work in conjunction with surrounding hospitals, schools etc. The clinical opportunities depend widely on the practices available to work in. Other important factors may be disability-related needs and the diversity at the school.

The application process to graduate school may seem daunting, but once you have considered these issues, you are well on your way to narrowing down the list of potential matches. Good luck!

Typical Requirements

Although requirements differ from program to program, here are the typical requirements to meet when applying for graduate schools in psychology. Check your programs of interest to identify their particular set of requirements.

Grade Point Average

Although a high GPA alone will not guarantee you admission into the school of your choice, the higher your GPA, the greater your chances of acceptance. Competitive programs usually require a GPA of 3.5 or higher.

GRE

Most graduate schools will require that you take the Graduate Record Exam (GRE), which consists of three sections: verbal, math, and analytic. Since these are subjects students don't often focus on in college, it is suggested that you prepare for the GRE by taking classes or studying on your own by using GRE preparatory books. Some programs will also require (and most will prefer) that you also take the Subject GRE in Psychology, which consists of multiple choice questions covering all fields within Psychology. A good way to prepare for this exam is to study your introductory psychology textbook. GRE scores are very important. Some very competitive schools may not even read the rest of the application if a student is below their GRE cut-off point.

Letters of Recommendation

Programs will usually require 2-4 letters of recommendation written by professionals in the field. These letters should come from professors in whose classes you did well and from professors you have conducted research with. It is important that these professors know you well. The more they know you, the better and the stronger their letters will be.

Required Courses

A BA in psychology is usually not required when applying for graduate schools in psychology. Nevertheless, psychology programs do require that you have certain background in psychology: either a certain amount of credits in psychology, or certain undergraduate courses. Courses such as statistics and experimental psychology are usually required by most programs. Specialized programs might also require specific relevant courses. For example, if you apply to a program in Clinical psychology, they may require candidates to have taken Physiological Psychology as undergrads.

Personal Statement

A personal statement is typically required as part of your application. It should describe in 2-3 pages your reasons for applying to graduate school in psychology, and what sets you apart from other candidates. When writing a personal statement, make sure to write about yourself, your background, and your accomplishments. Moreover, be sure to avoid platitudes (e.g., "I want to work with people") and tailor your personal statement to the school you are applying for: what about their program attracts you, why you want to work with that specific faculty, and what you have got to offer the program. Be as specific as possible.

Research Experience

This factor is crucial as it is what will set you aside from other applicants. Much of the work in graduate schools revolves around research. Working in a research lab as an undergraduate will prepare you for what is to come, and will show that you have a good sense of what will be expected of you as a graduate student. The more research work you do, the better. You don't need to worry if you are acquiring research experience in an area other than the one you are interested in (e.g. you are working at a lab on cognitive processes, but you want to focus on social psychology research in the future). What matters is that you acquire basic research skills, learn how a research lab runs, etc. These skills will translate into other research areas.

Field Work

Although not required by most schools, schools will be very impressed by field work in a setting related to their program. This is especially true for clinical and counseling programs, which will prefer that you have prior experience working in mental health settings. A good way to gain field work experience is by volunteering or doing internships at mental health institutions.

Goodness of Fit

Perhaps the most important aspect when applying to any program is to consider how well you would fit in it. In fact, the more your interests match those of the faculty teaching in the program, and the more you have the experience and skills that they are looking for, the more likely it is that they will select you. It is wise to apply to schools that have faculty with interests that fit with your own.

Many schools admit students into specific labs. That is, each faculty member will admit a certain number of students per year. In this case, the goodness of fit between your interests and your mentor-to-be is crucial. You should know that person's research program. You can greatly increase your chance of being accepted into a graduate program by identifying and applying to programs whose faculty you would be a good match for.

A good way of identifying such programs is by finding recently published articles on areas of your interest. Look up the authors. If a particular program is publishing many articles in an area of your interest, it is likely that you would be a good match for that program. To identify individual faculty within a program that may fit your interests, visit the program's websites and look up the faculty listings. These typically include a brief description of research interests and current projects, even selected publications. Use these listings to identify individual faculty who are doing work in your area of interest.

Becoming an Attractive Candidate

As you may have realized from reading this handbook, graduate programs in psychology can be quite competitive. Meeting the basic requirements (GPA, GRE scores,) or even excelling in this area, will only take you so far if you are competing against other students with outstanding scores. This is why you need to strive to set yourself apart from other candidates, and distinguish yourself. This is often hard to accomplish, but a good way of approaching this goal is by engaging in experiences and acquiring skills that will help you write a compelling statement of purpose. And hopefully, during this journey you will meet your will-be letter writers as well, and you will also add bullets to your resume.

Complete an Honors Thesis

As mentioned earlier, research experience is an extremely important admission criterion to graduate programs. A Psychology department Honors thesis provides students with the opportunity to collect data, conduct analyses and complete original research.

The first thing to do in order to sign up to complete an honor's thesis is to plan ahead. Browse the Hunter Faculty web site, which describes the current projects and research interests of each professor. Narrow your choices down to two or three professors by matching their interests with your own, and make initial contact at least one semester before the period you intend on starting your thesis. The professor will serve as your mentor for at least the next semester as you engage in literature reviews, generate your own hypothesis, prepare your own study and complete statistical analyses.

An Honors thesis demonstrates your commitment to psychology and motivation to expand your research skills and knowledge. After your thesis is completed, you may have the opportunity to present at a conference, or in rare cases you may even have the chance to publish your work on a peer-reviewed journal. Journals such as the *Psi Chi Journal of Undergraduate Research* and regional or national conferences provide ample opportunities for students to present or publish.

Finally, the professor you work with on your Honors Thesis may provide valuable information about the field or graduate schools you are considering, and more importantly, they may be willing to write a letter of recommendation for you that will be grounded on actual work the professor has seen you do.

Show Statistics Proficiency

Another way to get an edge when applying to schools is by demonstrating strong statistics skills. Since you will be doing lab work in graduate school, it is very important to show that you are comfortable with statistics.

Psych majors are required to take PSYC248 (Statistical Methods). This class will teach you basic statistical techniques and will give you basic exposure to PASW (also known as SPSS) – a software for statistical analysis that is widely used in the social sciences. Also, as a psych major, you will be required to take PSYC249 or PSYC250, research methods classes that will teach you how to design studies and present their results.

A good way of getting extra training in statistics is by taking PSYC348, a seminar class that will give you the opportunity to be a teacher assistant for PSYC248, grade lab and homework assignments, and tutor other students. Taking this class will help you show your level of proficiency in statistics, as well as your commitment and enthusiasm for research in general.

Finally, the need to demonstrate your knowledge of statistics and research design is another reason for doing an Honors Thesis. Completing this independent work will speak of your ability to design a study, to collect and analyze the data, and to interpret the results.

Present Your Work at Conferences

Presentations typically follow and are based on research work completed for a course or for an Honors Thesis. They involve either a 15-minute oral presentation for an audience, or the creation of a poster. Experience in presentation of research is a plus when applying to graduate programs and gives evidence of a thorough and well accomplished undergraduate program.

You should discuss with a faculty mentor or advisor the possibility of presenting your work at a conference. They will be able to provide you with different options and assist you with submission materials and deadlines.

A great opportunity for Hunter students to present their work is the Annual Hunter College Psychology Convention, held every Spring since the 1970s.

Publish Your Work in a Peer-Reviewed Journal

Publishing original work is perhaps the most challenging milestone to achieve for most undergraduate students. In fact, most students applying to graduate programs will not have published as undergrads.

What this means is that your application will look that much more impressive if you manage to publish your work on a peer-reviewed journal as an undergrad.

To publish an article, first you need to write it. This is another reason for doing an Honors Thesis, as the work you do may result in a paper that you could submit to a journal.

Discuss with your mentor the possibility of publishing your work. They may assist you by proposing different journals that may be interested in your article. They may also assist you in the writing of the article.

You can also write an article for publication in Psych News, the student-lead newsletter at Hunter. Most articles published do not show results from empirical work, but instead present a literature review on different topics within psychology. Being published is both rewarding and allows you to show off your writing skills, as well as your interest in psychology.

Gain Teaching Experience

Graduate students often receive teaching assistantships as a way to cover the costs of school (for example, they assist a professor with grading, etc. for a stipend, or they are placed to teach basic undergraduate courses). Although in and of itself teaching experience is not a requirement for graduate school, it is a great way to set yourself apart in a very competitive selection process.

The Psychology Department offers a class that grants some experience in this area (PSYC348). You can find information on this course in the previous section, “What Students Should be doing as Undergrads.” Keep in mind that this opportunity is open only to psych majors who passed PSYC248 with an A.

If statistics is not your strong suit, another way to get teaching experience can be volunteering at a community center and teaching children or high school students (these opportunities are more widely available over the summer).

Yet, another way to get some experience that will speak of your commitment, responsibility, and ability to communicate effectively with others is to become a Peer Advisor. Opportunities to do so are offered by the Sylvia E. Fishman Student Center (www.hunter.cuny.edu/student-services/sefsc/peeradvising).

Good luck on your career in psychology!

We hope you enjoy your time at Hunter, and that you find the right path for you. This handbook can help you planning the steps towards achieving your goals.

Remember, NOTHING can replace your engagement in your own career. Seek out information, talk to advisors and professors, get involved in club activities.

Immersing yourself in the psychology community at Hunter will make you aware of new opportunities and lines of work.

This can be the key to your success!

Sincerely,

**Psych Collective
Officers**

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