The road well traveled by psychological scientists has traditionally been academia, particularly for individuals interested in research and education. However, developments in our field, coupled with limited tenure-track opportunities, have led psychology graduates to stray from the beaten path and pursue less traditional employment options. The US Department of Education reports that in 1975, across higher-education institutions, close to 60% of faculty were in either tenured or tenure-track positions. By 2009, only 33.5% of faculty were working in tenure-track positions, with the majority not eligible for tenure (American Association of University Professors, n.d.; National Center for Education Statistics, 2014).

As the tenure-track academic position becomes increasingly elusive, newly minted psychological scientists are finding employment in a number of exciting fields outside academia. The objective of this article is to offer a sample of the fields, programs, and jobs where psychology is represented.

**Government**

Psychologists can find a home in a multitude of government agencies and corporations. For example, the FBI’s Behavioral Research and Instruction Unit hires psychological scientists to conduct research on topics ranging from stress management in law enforcement and the mind-set of gang members to cyber criminology (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2010). Additionally, programs within NASA not only employ psychologists to evaluate astronauts but also rely on human-factors and engineering psychologists for the development of aerospace technology, from screen and other interfaces to the design of the human space capsule. Other government agencies that hire psychologists include health care agencies, school systems, and US Customs and Border Protection. Training in psychological research design and quantitative methodologies will be highly valuable for any graduate student applying for employment at these agencies.

**Military**

The need for psychological scientists in the military may be more vital now than ever before as a result of both technological developments and recent combat. For example, the Naval Submarine Medical Research Laboratory is an underwater biomedical research lab that performs research on diving simulation, open ocean trials, submarine medicine, escape and rescue, and hearing conservation. Psychological scientists evaluate candidates to determine if they would be a good fit for the extreme work environment of a submarine submerged for up to 8 weeks. Scientists also work to reduce factors that may lead a person to become unfit for such environments (see www.med.navy.mil/sites/nsmrl/Pages/default.aspx for further information).

Graduate students can prepare for employment in this domain by training in personality or clinical psychology as well as by gaining experience with conducting assessments or stress-management
interventions. Psychologists who study sensation and perception may similarly be interested in military careers.

Other military programs that employ psychological scientists include the Army Research Laboratory’s major laboratory programs in human dimension and simulation and training technology (United States Army Research Laboratory, 2011). These programs conduct studies to improve soldiers’ performance in extreme military combat environments or medical emergencies, to predict human interactions with technology, and to design new technologies. Students interested in human-factors research or military psychology may be well suited for these career paths (Society for Military Psychology, n.d.).

Public-Sector Consulting

There are numerous avenues for psychological scientists to serve in the role of consultants in the public sector. Consultants provide input into the functioning of entire systems, serve staff and clients, and evaluate the suitability of training and work performance. For example, students with training in comparative psychology or animal behavior might be interested in zoo administration, a field in which scientists evaluate the impact of exhibits on both the animals and zoo attendees, conduct research on human–animal interaction, and develop science programming.

Psychological scientists are also hired in the public domain to lend suicide prevention expertise. State suicide organizations and Veterans Affairs hospitals hire psychologists to train clergy to perform evidence-based screenings and interventions. Community members who frequently interact with people (e.g., barbers, estheticians, and even bartenders) may also be trained to identify signs of suicide risks in rural areas.

Across organizations including hospital networks and educational systems, psychologists are developing programs for multicultural training. These efforts include directing effective implementation of diversity strategies and developing approaches that increase the likelihood that specific groups will return for follow-up care or comply with medical recommendations. Psychological scientists aspiring to enter these fields can enrich their credentials through training in disciplines that extend beyond psychology, including cultural anthropology, global health, and social medicine.

Private Sector

Having a unique skill set can pave the way for job opportunities in the private sector. Design psychologists develop optimal work spaces based on psychological research rather than on simple aesthetics. In human resources, psychological scientists help determine cases of employment discrimination. In the legal sector, psychological scientists serve as consultants for the development of trial strategies based on social and cognitive psychology research. Psychologists may also assist gaming companies with affective programming both to realistically depict emotions graphically and to develop the necessary complex statistical modeling necessary for game design.

Countless aspects of our modern, media-driven lives depend on psychological scientists working behind the scenes, developing algorithms for dating websites, creating interfaces for smartphone applications (Careers in Psychology, n.d.), and coining catchy branding. In fact, Facebook is currently collecting data
with some of the largest sample sizes ever known — for example, one project is examining self-censorship by analyzing the content users type but don’t submit, such as typing a status update and not posting it (Johnston, 2013).

**Entrepreneurial**

Ambitious, innovative scientists — particularly those interested in addressing a specific niche — may consider developing a psychology start-up. Examples of psychology start-ups include Lantern, a program that offers mental health services on demand with licensed professionals, and Good.Co, which matches individuals’ characteristics with employers, thus enhancing job fit (Angel List, n.d.). It can be easier — and more viable — to take classes in business, management, and economics before starting a venture in psychology. During graduate school, you are surrounded by a very large network of potential colleagues, adding another great reason to get out of your department and socialize. Interdisciplinary friends can help you achieve the goal of starting your own company.

As our field grows, opportunities for psychological scientists to work in multidisciplinary atmospheres will also continue to expand. Although academic research will surely remain a desirable career path, today’s crop of burgeoning psychological scientists will find many exciting opportunities to make a difference through nontraditional careers, perhaps in unusual work environments.

**References**


