

# What Can I Do With An Undergraduate Degree?

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When you tell people that you were a psychology major, how many have said “Oh, you’ll never get anywhere with just that” or “Oh, so you want to go into counseling then, huh?” After awhile do you start to get discouraged, because you don’t know how to respond to those kinds of comments?

Psi Chi, the national honorary society for undergraduate psychology majors, may have some answers for you.

In a symposium on career options for undergraduate psychology majors given at the APS Annual Convention, Elizabeth Yost Hammer, a psychology professor at Loyola University New Orleans, Peter Giordano, a professor at Belmont University, and Elliot Hammer, professor at Xavier University, provided some valuable insights.

Although many positions in psychology require a graduate degree, an undergraduate background in psychology equips students for careers in numerous other areas. Giordano and Hammer gave examples of countless fields where a psychology degree could be relevant, including research, human resources, public relations and advertising, market research, teaching, and retail and sales.

Giordano gave a list of skills that psychology students gain through their experience in research and working on group projects, which might be of interest to a potential employer: Communication skills (both oral and written), analytical and computer skills, critical thinking skills, organizational skills, and teamwork skills. In addition, psychology majors should emphasize their high ethical and moral standards, through their understanding of the required ethical treatment of experimental subjects and adhering to IRB standards. Psychology majors also may have more of an understanding of how to deal with different people, through their study of human behavior.

One example given was of a former psychology student who went into investment banking. He was asked to prepare a presentation one day, and his co-workers were amazed at how clearly he had organized it. He replied that this was how he learned to write papers in psychology, by breaking the paper down into introduction, method or procedures, results and conclusions sections.

Giordano and Hammer talked primarily about careers in working with people. Jesse Purdy, the Brown Distinguished Research Professor at Southwestern University, addressed the question “Is It Possible to Make a Living Studying Animals?” Noting that animal studies have provided insight into aspects of human life, including learning and cognition, neuroscience, development, and the biotech and healthcare

industries, to name a few, Purdy encouraged undergraduates to considering working in these areas of research. Animal enthusiasts can also work in zoos, aquariums, and research facilities, plus there is also the growing field of training working animals to help disabled people and law enforcement.

Clearly, there are a lot of options for psychology majors who are not interested in graduate school. Giordano said that only 25 percent of college psychology majors go on to graduate school in their field, so there is plenty of hope for those looking for careers in psychology. And you can do like I did – I got my undergraduate degree in psychology from St. Lawrence University in 2002, and I’m using my training here in the Communications Department at APS!

## RESOURCES

Morgan, B. L., Korschgen, A. J. (2001). *Majoring in Psych? Career Options for Psychology Undergraduates*. (2nd ed.) Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

[Psi Chi](#) has a 3 part-series on Career Options and Strategies for Psychology Majors.

[Finding Careers with a Bachelor’s Degree in Psychology](#)

[University of Tennessee](#) [PDF]

### Sources of Funding for Undergraduate Research

Another part of the Psi Chi Symposium at the APS Convention focused on finding sources of funding for undergraduate research. Although less funding is available for undergraduate projects than for graduate research projects, there are still some obtainable sources.

The Council on Undergraduate Research sponsors a summer fellowship program that allows students and faculty to work together on projects. Its website is [www.cur.org](http://www.cur.org).

The National Science Foundation also sponsors a program called Research Experiences for Undergraduates, which gives students a stipend to spend 10 weeks over the summer at a host institution where they work directly with researchers. Between 20 and 25 institutions participate each year, with 10 students at each school. More information can be found at [www.nsf.gov/home/crssprgm/reu](http://www.nsf.gov/home/crssprgm/reu). Psi Chi is also sponsoring six students to participate in this program. They will be studying psychological research (more information about Psi Chi-sponsored funding opportunities can be found at [www.psichi.org/content/awards/list.asp](http://www.psichi.org/content/awards/list.asp)).

For under-represented minority students, additional funding opportunities are available from NIH, NIMH, and the Department of Education, just to name a few. Vincent Prohaska, moderator of the symposium, also mentioned that non-minority schools can get additional funding from NIH and NSF if they are including minority undergraduate researchers. And there is always one’s own university to look to as a source for funding.