

Are You Considering Psychology as Your Major at IUPUI?

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Before you decide to become a psychology major at IUPUI, you should do your best to discover the answers to the following four questions. Your answers will enable you to understand yourself—and the field of psychology—in a more informed manner. Then you can make a wise and realistic decision about your academic major.

1. What is psychology?
2. What are my skills, beliefs, and interests?
3. What is the IUPUI psychology department like?
4. What can I do with a psychology major?

What is psychology?

Psychology is a science, a profession, and a means of promoting human welfare. It is defined as the scientific study of behavior (what we do) and mental processes (how we perceive, think, and feel). Psychologists use the findings from these studies to improve the quality of human life in an ever-changing and complex world.

Psychology has four goals: to describe, understand, predict, and change—where appropriate—behavior and mental processes. Psychologists use many methods to accomplish these goals including well-controlled laboratory experiments, naturalistic observations, case studies, surveys, statistical analyses, and psychotherapy.

Psychology is characterized by a variety of perspectives. For example, biological psychologists attempt to understand how behavior and mental processes are affected by the anatomy and physiology of the nervous system, whereas socio-cultural psychologists look to a person's social environment and culture for answers to behavioral or mental questions.

Finally, there are two basic types of psychologists. Research psychologists discover the basic principles underlying behavior and mental processes. Applied psychologists put the knowledge gained by their research colleagues into practice. In summary, psychology is a complex, scientific endeavor that attempts to increase the quality of human life.

What are my skills, beliefs, and interests?

Successful IUPUI psychology majors possess the following skills, beliefs, and interests.

- They are skillful students who are willing and able to increase their understanding of the complexities of human and animal behaviors and mental processes.
- They possess the critical-thinking, statistical, and communication skills necessary to perform research, draw valid conclusions from their data, and report their findings in a clear and unbiased manner.
- They believe that the scientific method is the best way to test the effectiveness of people-helping methods, and understand that these methods must be tested thoroughly before they are put into practice.
- They are eager to help others whose behavior and mental processes put them at risk.

Do the following questions interest you?

- How do different types of drugs affect the brain, behavior, and mental processes?
- How do children form attachments to their parents, and what happens when these attachments fail?
- Can personality type contribute to the development of certain diseases (e.g., heart disease or cancer)?
- What working conditions produce the greatest job satisfaction and productivity?
- Why do students remember some of the things they study and forget others?
- Which behaviors are just a little out of the ordinary, and which are truly abnormal?
- What makes some people highly conscientious and others unreliable, neglectful, and careless?
- Why are people sometimes generous and helpful, and why are they sometimes not?

If these questions fail to stimulate your curiosity and if you do not possess the skills, beliefs, and interests of successful IUPUI psychology majors, then it is time to stop reading this brochure and begin the search for another major. However, if you found your skills, beliefs, and interests to be similar to those in the above list and you were intrigued by the accompanying set of questions, then psychology may be a good choice of a major. If this is the case, please keep reading . . .

What is the IUPUI Psychology Department like?

If you choose to major in psychology at IUPUI, you will be joining a department with a uniquely scientific orientation. Most colleges and universities place psychology in their social studies division with disciplines like history, political science, sociology, and economics. In contrast, IUPUI includes psychology in its School of Science along with biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, geology, and computer science. This classification fits well with psychology's definition as the scientific study of behavior and mental processes. But it also means that psychology at IUPUI is not only classified as a science, it is also funded like a science, conducted like a science, and taught like a science.

The members of the psychology faculty are hired for their ability to perform cutting-edge research and to share the results of their research through publication in professional journals and presentations at national and international conferences. They are also eager to share their knowledge with you. You will learn from them in their classrooms and in their well-equipped and technologically advanced laboratories. Their ability to teach you what psychologists have discovered will serve as the intellectual catalyst that will lead you naturally into research partnerships with them in which you can apply psychological methods, discover psychological principles, and test psychological theories.

Evidence of this high level of research mentoring in the department is displayed on two large bulletin boards in the School of Science building. These boards are covered with reprints of the professional publications of the faculty, many of which bear the names of IUPUI psychology majors as co-authors.

Science is the active process of testing hypotheses and discovering new knowledge, not the passive process of memorizing and regurgitating existing facts. If what you have been reading on this page has awakened your sense of intellectual excitement—and you would like to pursue psychology as a scientific endeavor—then you will be making a wise choice if you decide to major in psychology at IUPUI.

What can I do with a psychology major?

IUPUI psychology majors take two different paths when they graduate. One path leads them to graduate school, where they prepare themselves to become professional psychologists. The other path leads immediately to careers in which they apply the skills they acquired during their undergraduate education. It is important to understand this distinction because the path you choose will have a profound impact on how you should approach your undergraduate education.

If you want to become a psychologist, you will need the credentials to gain admission to an accredited graduate program and the motivation and ability to complete that program. As an undergraduate, you must earn top-notch grades, perform well on both the verbal and quantitative sections of the Graduate Record Exam (a more challenging version of the SAT), prove your ability to perform research, and secure at least three very strong letters of recommendation that testify to your ability to succeed in graduate school. Competition for entrance into good graduate programs can be fierce, but many IUPUI psychology graduates have been successful in their quest for masters and doctoral degrees. It is crucial to understand these challenges if you want to become a professional psychologist. You may wish to reconsider this career path if your previous academic performance has been less than stellar, your SAT scores were mediocre, and you dislike or perform poorly in math and science courses. These circumstances need not doom you to failure, but they are often accurate indicators of poor future performance. If they pertain to you—and you aspire to a career as a professional psychologist—you must find ways to change your behaviors (e.g., develop better study skills) if you wish to accomplish your goal.

If you want your career to begin immediately after you obtain a bachelors degree, you must also plan carefully, work hard, and accomplish much. The curriculum you will complete as an IUPUI psychology major will provide you with abundant opportunities to develop the skills needed to enter and thrive in a variety of occupations such as mental

health services, human resources, administration, community relations, public relations, advertising, and market research.

It is important to realize that you must be aware of the skills your desired career will require and then work hard to obtain them. Do not take English composition just because it is required; take it to become a better writer if your job will require writing skills—and almost all jobs do. If you are interested in a career in business, consider a minor in business. If market research is your target occupation, be sure to take as many statistics and research courses as you can. If a career in public relations is your goal, then try your best to obtain an internship with the public relations office of a local business or agency. If you aspire to a job in which you will manage others rather than having them manage you, then become involved in an organization like Psychology Club where you can assume a position of leadership that will develop your managerial skills. With more than 74,000 psychology majors graduating from American colleges and universities each year, you must set yourself apart from your peers during the hiring process by developing a unique set of skills and knowledge.

A recent survey performed at the University of Virginia revealed that their alumni reported writing, speaking, critical-thinking, interpersonal, and problem-solving skills as the most important career preparation talents they developed during their undergraduate careers. Heed their advice by making the most of your undergraduate education to develop yourself into the type of person who is hired quickly, promoted rapidly, and chosen for positions of leadership.

Now you know what psychology is. You understand your own skills, beliefs, and interests more clearly. You are better informed about the IUPUI Psychology Department. You also know more about what you can do with your undergraduate degree. If psychology is still an appealing area of study to you, then it is time to give it serious consideration as your major. For more information about the psychology major, visit the Psychology Department in the Science Building or visit our website at www.psych.iupui.edu. I would be more than willing to help you investigate your future in psychology at IUPUI . . . and beyond.