

Undergraduate Psychology Major Handbook:

How to get the most out your EIU Psychology Degree

Department of Psychology Mission Statement

The Department of Psychology emphasizes the scientific study of behavioral, affective, and cognitive processes and their application to real-world issues by engaging students in integrative learning experiences such as undergraduate and graduate research, internships, and enhanced classroom experiences.

Faculty excellence in areas of teaching, research, and service provides the context for collaborative student-centered learning experiences that promote inclusion and diverse perspectives. The department's curriculum furthers the development of students' critical thinking, communication skills, research skills, quantitative reasoning, and ethical behavior in preparation for responsible citizenship, careers, graduate study, and lifelong learning.

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Is Psychology the Right Major for Me?

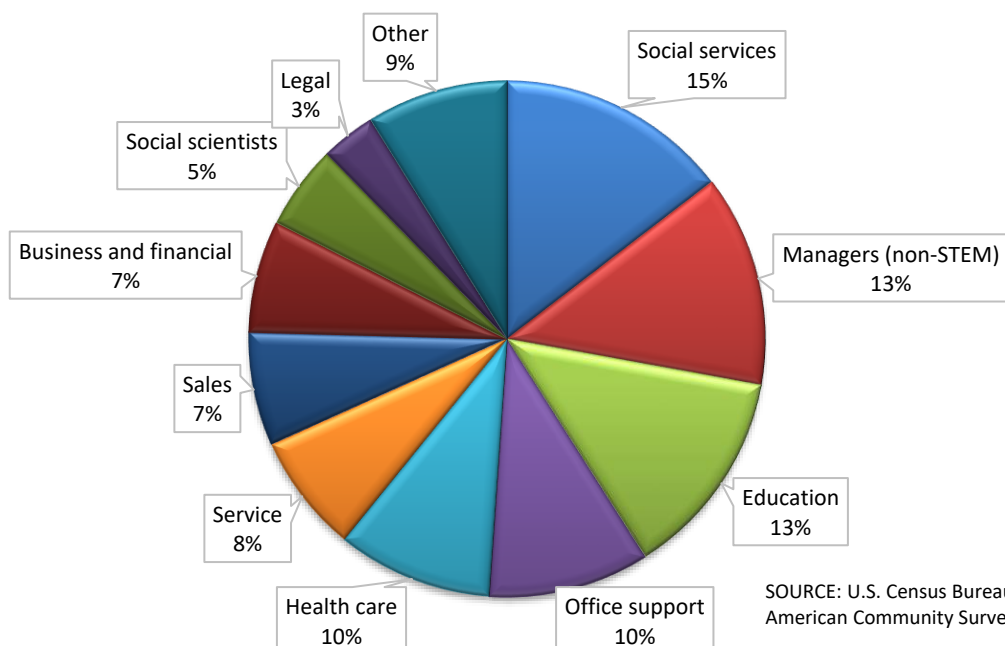
P sychology is the scientific study of behavior and mental processes. Because many fields rely on the understanding of human behavior, psychology has widespread applications. If you enjoy working with people, are interested in human behavior, and have a scientific view of the world, then majoring in psychology may be of interest to you.

This handbook is designed to answer the most frequent questions that students have about the psychology major. It functions as an excellent reference for understanding the requirements and resources found in the Department of Psychology. It also provides links to resources on the internet that are relevant to psychology majors. The [Department of Psychology Learning Goals](#) align with those of the American Psychological Association.

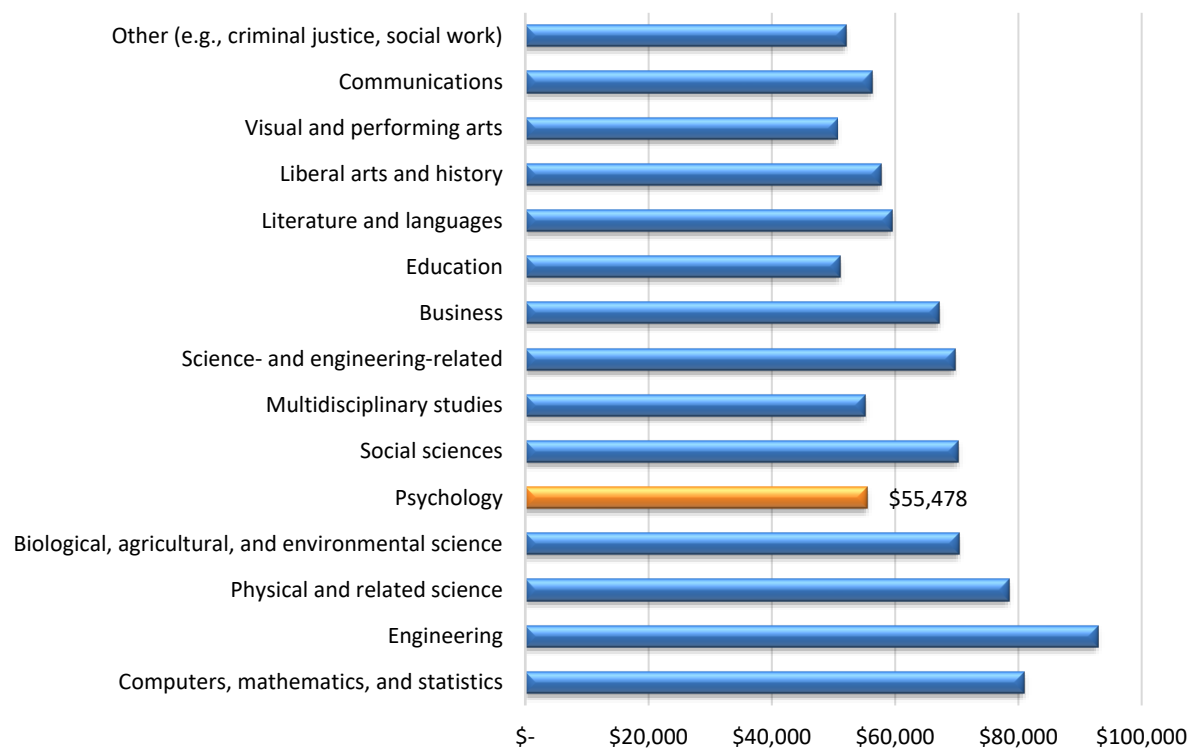
What can I do with a Bachelor's Degree in psychology?

AREAS	EMPLOYERS	STRATEGIES
HUMAN SERVICES Counseling, Advocacy, Human Health Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federal Government Depts of Health & Human Services, Veterans' Administration, and Justice State Govt Depts of Human Services, Mental Health, and Mental Retardation, psychiatric hospitals, community mental health centers, facilities for the mentally retarded, and probation/parole depts Local Government: senior citizens' centers Non-Profit Organizations such as United Way, Goodwill Industries, Boys and Girls Clubs, and YWCA/YMCA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Obtain essential practical experience such as residence hall advisor or camp counselor Enroll in an internship or practicum Perform volunteer services such as Special Olympics, Big Brother/Sister, or crisis hotline Learn foreign language for multi-cultural clients Become familiar with government hiring procedures Be willing to relocate Be prepared to obtain a masters degree for more substantive counseling work
ADMINISTRATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federal, state, and local governments National headquarters and local branches of nonprofit organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider a business double major or minor Gain experience in counseling, advocacy, or administration Need masters in health care administration for advancement
COMMUNITY RELATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federal, state, or local government Local branches of national non-profit organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gain experience in counseling, advocacy, or administration Gain knowledge of community problems and govt resources
PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federal, state, or local government Headquarters and branches of non-profit organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gain experience in counseling, advocacy, or administration Obtain graduate degree for advancement
RESEARCH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federal government, especially Dept of Health & Human Services and National Institute of Education National headquarters of non-profit organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop strong quantitative, statistical, and research skills Obtain graduate degree for advancement
HUMAN RESOURCES Employment & Recruitment, Labor Relations, Compensation & Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Human resources (personnel) departments of companies Government personnel agencies and departments Employment agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acquire related experiences such as a residence hall advisor, new student orientation leader, admissions office tour guide/recruiter, or member of committees that make policy, settle disputes, or adjudicate cases
PUBLIC RELATIONS Research, Programming, Fund-Raising, Writing & Editing, Special Events, Media Placement, Public Speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public relations and advertising firms Companies with in-house PR depts Trade associations Federal, state, and local government Colleges and universities Non-profit organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop strong writing and speaking skills Obtain related experiences with campus newspaper, TV, or radio, Admissions office tour guide or recruiter, Student activities office planning Serve as a fund raiser or political canvasser Find internship through Public Relations Society of America
ADVERTISING Creative, Media, Account Services, or Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advertising agencies Companies with in-house advertising agencies or depts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Obtain experience with campus TV, radio, or newspaper Work with a student-run business Find an internship with a market research firm or a member of the American Advertising Federation Develop a portfolio for a creative position Business minor or double major for Account Services jobs
MARKET RESEARCH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Market research firms Market research departments of consumer goods and manufacturing firms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop strong math/statistics skills Become involved in the American Marketing Association Obtain a part-time or summer job with a market research firm (see Marketing Services in the yellow pages), perform a Business Dept practicum, become a reporter for campus newspaper, serve as a canvasser/phone interviewer for a charity or political campaign
TEACHING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public and private schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Obtain a teaching certificate for public school positions Seek guidance from the Education Dept in your school Volunteer as a tutor
RETAIL / SALES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All major retail firms including pharmaceuticals, specialty, variety, and department store chains Wholesalers, manufacturers, insurance companies, and real estate companies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Obtain related sales experiences with part-time or summer retail job or work with campus newspaper or yearbook Secure leadership position in campus organization Perform an internship with a retail store

Where do Psychology Majors with a Bachelor's Degree Work? (2012)



Median Earnings of College Graduates by Field of Bachelor's Degree (2012)



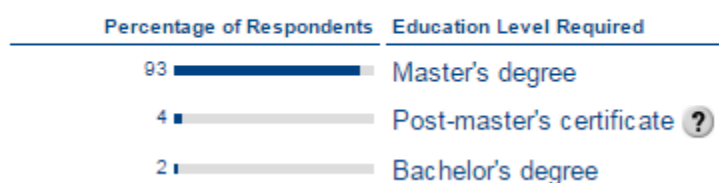
In-Depth Job Description Information

The [Occupational Information Network](#) (O*NET OnLine) provides in-depth job description information, including required knowledge and skills, job duties, wages, and projected growth for thousands of different careers, including many in psychology and psychology-related fields. For example, here is a portion of the information listed for [Educational, Guidance, School, and Vocational Counselor](#)

Tasks

- Counsel individuals to help them understand and overcome personal, social, or behavioral problems affecting their educational or vocational situations.
- Provide crisis intervention to students when difficult situations occur at schools.
- Confer with parents or guardians, teachers, administrators, and other professionals to discuss children's progress, resolve behavioral, academic, and other problems, and to determine priorities for students and their resource needs.
- Prepare students for later educational experiences by encouraging them to explore learning opportunities and to persevere with challenging tasks.
- Evaluate students' or individuals' abilities, interests, and personality characteristics using tests, records, interviews, or professional sources.
- Identify cases of domestic abuse or other family problems and encourage students or parents to seek additional assistance from mental health professionals.
- Counsel students regarding educational issues, such as course and program selection, class scheduling and registration, school adjustment, truancy, study habits, and career planning.
- Provide special services such as alcohol and drug prevention programs and classes that teach students to handle conflicts without resorting to violence.
- Conduct follow-up interviews with counselees to determine if their needs have been met.

Education



Wages & Employment Trends (National)

Median wages (2023)	\$29.67 hourly, \$61,710 annual
Employment (2023)	360,800 employees
Projected growth (2023-2033)	Faster than Average (3-5%)
Projected job openings (2023-2033)	29,100

Websites with Career/Advising Information for Psychology Students

[VeryWell: Psychology](#)

This site has information about different careers in psychology as well as typical wages, working conditions, and job outlooks. There are profiles of careers in clinical psychology, forensic psychology, industrial-organizational psychology, and other areas. The site has a link to a 10-item quiz that you can take to learn more about the psychology careers that match your interests.

[Association for Psychological Science \(APS\)](#)

This link will take you to the home page for the Association of Psychological Science (APS). A search for “careers” at this site will produce a list of APS articles on career-related issues.

[Careers in Psychology \(APA\)](#)

This website, from the American Psychological Association (APA), features a brochure on career information. Topics include what psychology is, some of the subfields in psychology, job outlook, what psychologists do and where they do it, and getting ready to work in psychology.

[Online Psychology Career Center](#)

This site is maintained by Scott Plous, a social psychologist at Wesleyan University. It has numerous links to documents and other sites with information on such topics as frequently asked career questions, finding careers with a bachelor’s degree, survey reports on employment data (from the APA), and psychological scientists in the private sector (from the Association of Psychological Science – the APS).

Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP)

- STP has published a free e-book that contains helpful advising information for specific sub-disciplines in psychology titled “[Academic Advising: A Handbook for Advisors and Students, Vol 2: A guide to the Sub-disciplines.](#)”
- STP has also published “[Psychology Career Advice Videos](#)” by Kit Nast of Bishop State Community College that describe, “how videos on the website www.drkit.org may be used to help students as they determine which careers and college degrees to pursue. The site is especially useful for high school, college, and graduate students in all majors, but especially in psychology.”

Advising

What is advising?

“Academic advising, based in the teaching and learning mission of higher education, is a series of intentional interactions with a curriculum, a pedagogy, and a set of student learning outcomes. Academic advising synthesizes and contextualizes students’ educational experiences within the frameworks of their aspirations, abilities and lives to extend learning beyond campus boundaries and timeframes.”

Through the advising experience, students will:

1. craft a coherent educational plan based on assessment of abilities, aspirations, interests, and values
2. use complex information from various sources to set goals, reach decisions, and achieve those goals
3. assume responsibility for meeting academic program requirements
4. articulate the meaning of higher education and the intent of the institution’s curriculum

National: The Global Community for Academic Advising. (2006). NACADA concept of academic advising. Retrieved from NACADA Clearinghouse of Academic Advising Resources Web Site: <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Concept-of-Academic-Advising-a598.aspx>

Advising provides you with advice and guidance related to your progress toward graduation and encourages you to reflect intentionally on preparation for the future. You should not expect your advisor to choose which specific classes you should take and what time of day to take them.

Who is my advisor?

Each undergraduate student majoring in psychology is assigned an advisor in Academic Advising to assist with academic planning each semester. You may find out who your advisor is in the Department of Psychology office, room 1151 in the Physical Science Building (217-581-2127); the name of your academic advisor will also be listed on your degree audit in [Panther Access to Web Services \(PAWS\)](#).

Students who plan on transferring to EIU from another college meet with a member of the Department of Psychology faculty, typically the chair or assistant chair of the department, during their transfer orientation day on campus.

When should I see my advisor?

Each semester, you should meet with your advisor prior to the date when registration opens. You will need an alternate pin number from your advisor before you can register for classes.

How should I prepare for my advising appointment?

It is best to schedule an appointment with your advisor after you have reviewed the schedule of classes for the next semester and the general education and psychology courses that you still need to complete.

You can review your progress toward completing your requirements by conducting a “degree audit” using Degree Works: In [PAWS](#), go to Student>>Student Records>>Degree Works (Request and Review Degree Audits). FAQs about the degree audit are listed here:

<https://www.eiu.edu/caneiu/degreeaudit.php>

This advanced preparation will enable you to be better prepared to discuss your academic progress and ask relevant questions when you meet with your advisor. You should come to the advising meeting with an outline of courses you are considering for the next semester, a list of any questions you may have, and something for taking notes.

How long will my advising appointment last?

The typical meeting with your advisor lasts between 15 to 30 minutes. If you have reason to believe that you will require more than 30 minutes, then you should mention this to your advisor when scheduling your appointment.

When can I register?

The day you can register depends on your class standing, for example junior or senior. The chart with registration dates is available from the [registrar's office](#).

Checklists for the Psychology Major and related programs

[Psychology Major Checklist](#)

[Suggested 4-year Plan of Study for the BA Degree in Psychology](#)

Course Descriptions and Prerequisites

[See the university catalog](#)

What classes should I take first?

First, you'll need to earn a C or better in PSY 1879G (Introductory Psychology) or PSY 1890G (Honors) and meet the math requirement (MAT 1271 or higher level math course, with a grade of C or better; or ACT math score of 26 or higher). Then, begin with orientation to the Psychology Major (PSY 2999) and Psychological Statistics (PSY 3610), followed by Research Methods (PSY 3805) as soon as possible.

The table on the next page lists strongly recommended (potentially required) classes if you are interested in pursuing a graduate degree in Clinical, Counseling, Developmental, or School Psychology. You must still meet all the other requirements for the major. For recommended courses in other areas of psychology (industrial/organizational, cognitive, physiological, social, forensic, etc.), please talk to your advisor or a faculty member of the psychology department with expertise in that area.

For an excellent overview of courses generally required for graduate programs in psychology, see Dr. John Norcross's article "[Which Course, Which Course? The Undergraduate Courses Expected by Graduate Psychology Programs](#)" found on the National Psi Chi web site. He also mentions courses in areas outside of psychology that would be helpful for students planning to go to graduate school.

Capstone and Seminars

Capstone Requirement

Literally, a capstone is a finish-quality stone placed on top of a structure. In the psychology major, it refers to a crowning experience that is designed to integrate the skills you have learned as a psychology major within the context of a capstone course (see the [list of capstone courses](#)). Graduation with a major in psychology requires the completion of a capstone experience entailing four components:

1. Oral presentation of information about psychology
2. Engagement with original primary literature in psychology
3. Written communication of information about psychology
4. Critical and integrative thinking about psychology

The capstone requirement must be met **after** you have completed 90 semester hours and PSY 3805 - Research Methods in Psychology, with a grade of C or better. The capstone requirement may also be met by completing individual components in other classes (e.g., PSY 4100F), or by non-class activities. All activities outside of a capstone course must have the approval of the department chair.

Seminar Courses

"Seminar" can refer to several different courses that should not be confused with each other. The catalog descriptions for PSY 4585 (Special Topics in Psychology) and PSY 4590 (Psychology Seminar) are similar in that they both involve intensive study in specific areas within the discipline through lectures, readings, papers, and discussion. However, PSY 4590 (Psychology Seminar) counts as a capstone course for the major, whereas PSY 4585 (Special Topics in Psychology) does not. Furthermore, PSY 4590 (Psychology Seminar) is different from the senior seminar requirement for graduation as described in the [General Education requirements](#) of the university catalog.

Do I need a minor?

A minor in another field of study is not required for graduation. However, after adding the number of hours needed to fulfill the general education requirements and the number of hours required for a

psychology major, you may still need to take 25-30 semester hours to meet the 120-hour graduation requirement. Thus, choosing a minor can help guide the selection of these remaining courses for graduation. Furthermore, if you plan to go into a particular field of psychology, having a minor can be helpful. For example, a minor in business may be wise if you plan to go into industrial/organizational psychology.

Generally speaking, psychology faculty are not familiar with other departments' minor requirements and will not be able to advise you beyond what is already stated in the [online catalog](#) regarding majors and minors. If you have questions about requirements for a minor, please ask the department that offers the minor.

Suggested Courses for Graduate School Programs in Selected Areas

Clinical	Counseling	Developmental	School	Course Number	Course Title
				Required	
✓	✓	✓	✓	PSY1879G	Introductory Psychology
✓	✓	✓	✓	PSY3610	Statistical Methods of Psychology
✓	✓	✓	✓	PSY2999	Orientation to the Psychology Major
✓	✓	✓	✓	PSY3805	Research Methods & Experimental Design
✓	✓	✓	✓	PSY4XXX	Psychology Capstone Course
				Group A:	Individual Differences and Social Influences – Minimum of two from:
		✓		PSY3590	Theories of Personality
✓	✓		✓	PSY3780	Psychological Disorders
✓				PSY3870	Social Psychology
				Group B:	Biological Foundations of Behavior – Minimum of one from:
✓	✓	✓	✓	PSY3310	Biological Psychology
				PSY3680	Sensation & Perception
				PSY3820	Cognitive Neuroscience
				Group C:	Learning, Memory & Cognition– Minimum of one from:
✓	✓	✓	✓	PSY3620	Psychology of Learning
				PSY3710	Human Memory
✓				PSY3830	Cognitive Processes
				Group D:	Psychology Across the Lifespan – Minimum of one from:
		✓	✓	PSY3515	Child Psychology
		✓		PSY3521	Psychology of Adolescence & Young Adulthood
		✓		PSY3525	Psychology of Maturity & Old Age
				Electives*	
✓	✓			PSY4274	Orientation to Undergraduate Internship
✓	✓			PSY4275	Undergraduate Internship in Psychology
				PSY3260	Group Dynamics
				PSY3530	Industrial/Organizational Psychology
				PSY3690	Controversial Topics
				PSY3720	Psychology of Gender
	✓		✓	PSY3900	Independent Study
				PSY4000	Problem Solving & Reasoning
✓		✓	✓	PSY4100	Undergraduate research
				PSY4250	History and Systems
				PSY4260	Crisis Intervention
				PSY4270	Theories of Psychotherapy
			✓	PSY4265	Methods in Behavioral Management
				PSY4590	Psychology Seminar
		✓		PSY4515	Children with Exceptionalities
			✓	PSY4610	Advanced Statistics
✓			✓	PSY4620	Psychological Measurements
				PSY4700	Prejudice and Discrimination

Undergraduate Internship

Description

The undergraduate internship program in psychology involves preparation for and completion of an internship in fields such as human services, human resources, child and/or adolescent services, or the criminal justice system.

Completion of an undergraduate internship can improve chances of admission to graduate programs. In other cases, completion of an internship has led to employment in a substance disorders treatment center, domestic violence program, mental health clinic, or human resource office upon graduation.

Requirements

To earn 3 credits, interns complete 135 hours of work during the fall, spring, or summer terms. Interns receive dual supervision from a site supervisor and a faculty supervisor. Students are expected to keep a log of their hours and activities and have regular supervision from both supervisors.

Prerequisites

Interns must successfully complete PSY 4274, Orientation to Internship (1 credit), prior to registering for the internship course (PSY 4275, 3 credits). These 4 credits count toward the 120 credits required for graduation, but not as electives for the major.

Internship Locations

Students are encouraged to find their own internships, particularly when looking for an internship outside of Coles County. Prospective interns have the responsibility of finding, interviewing for, and securing their internship. In the Coles County area, there are many internship sites available including women's services, children's services, mental health, public health, hospital settings, day-treatment programs, developmental disabilities agencies, chemical dependency treatment programs, educational settings, family law and forensic settings, sexual assault victim services, and domestic violence programs.

For more information, including specific locations, see our [internship web site](#).

Undergraduate Research

What is the difference between independent study and undergraduate research?

Independent study (PSY 3900) is typically for students who want to pursue a topic of particular interest that is not covered by a regularly scheduled class or seminar. For example, a student may be interested in studying subjective well-being or ape language research. Under the direction of a faculty member, the student may be given a list of special readings or be asked to do a literature review and write a paper about the topic.

Undergraduate research (PSY 4100) is intended for students who want to engage in research under the guidance of a psychology faculty member. Students may assist faculty members in their ongoing research projects, or students may conduct their own project under the guidance of a psychology faculty member. The [Department of Psychology Website](#) maintains an updated list of faculty research interests and their requirements for students doing undergraduate research (see the “Student Research” link).

What are the benefits of doing independent study or undergraduate research?

Independent study and undergraduate research are an excellent means for a student to personalize their course of study through intensive exploration of a topic that is of particular interest to them. Many students report this to be a highlight of their college experience. In addition, students seeking admission to graduate school can expect a graduate admissions committee to value the ambition and intellectual curiosity demonstrated by undergraduate research. Both independent study and undergraduate research allow students to have more extensive and personalized attention than can be obtained in the classroom. Since a letter of recommendation is strongest when a faculty member can report knowing the student quite well, this more extensive contact with a professor can result in a particularly strong letter of recommendation.

When should I take independent study or undergraduate research?

If you plan to use the experience to strengthen your application to graduate school, you should start the first semester of your junior year (as long as your coursework meets the requirements of the individual faculty member). Graduate school applications and letters of recommendation are often due midway through your senior year, so it is better to have a good start on your undergraduate research experience prior to this.

How do I get started?

First, you should decide which faculty member you would like to work with. If you are planning to conduct your own research project, you should have some idea of the research topic that you are interested in pursuing so the faculty member can decide if they feel comfortable supervising the project. Keep in mind that many faculty do not require student research interests to match their own research interests. Students conducting their own research project and those who are assisting faculty in their ongoing research will need to complete a form available from the department office and signed by the faculty sponsor. Return the form to the department secretary who will register you for the appropriate class and credit hours.

Transfer Students

Which classes will transfer to EIU?

The Illinois Articulation Initiative specifies which courses will transfer among Illinois Schools. This ensures that quality coursework is maintained and that courses will be accepted by other institutions who have agreed to participate in the initiative. You can find out which courses will transfer to/from EIU, including psychology courses, by accessing the [MyCreditsTransfer tool](#)

Or, you can look up your community college course substitution list on the [EIU transfer website](#)

Why don't I get upper-division credit when transferring psychology courses?

When transferring psychology courses to EIU, the transferred course(s) will count toward the number of hours required for graduation and toward the psychology major requirements (usually as substitutions for the courses that EIU offers or as elective credit). However, you will not receive credit toward meeting the 40-hour upper-division credit requirement for graduation, even though EIU may offer an upper-division course by the same title. EIU does not consider courses taught at the community college level to have the same rigor and demands of upper-division courses taught at EIU. As stated in the catalog, "Courses from a community college or other two-year institution will not count in the 40 semester hours of upper-division credit."

Graduation (You're almost there!)

How and when do I apply for graduation?

Students may apply for graduation when they have completed 60 semester hours. It is strongly recommended that you apply for graduation at least one year before you plan to graduate to ensure that you have met or will meet all of the graduation requirements during your last two semesters on campus. This is especially true for students who have transferred hours from other institutions to EIU.

Currently, you may apply for graduation through the PAWS System. When you submit your application for graduation, your billing account will automatically be charged the \$40 application fee. See the [Records Office web site](#) for additional information on deadlines for application, Cap & Gown, Diploma Covers, and Reapplication for Graduation.

Several weeks after you have applied for graduation, a staff member from the College of Sciences Dean's office will contact you about scheduling a time to go over your degree audit. This audit includes an evaluation of your overall progress toward graduation, as well as a review of the remaining courses and requirements that must be completed. You will be provided with a written statement of the requirements you still need to complete prior to graduation, as well as an opportunity to ask any questions about the graduation requirements that pertain to you.

Graduate School

Overview for Applying to Graduate School in Psychology

What are the basic steps involved in deciding and applying for graduate school in psychology? What timeline should you follow? Many students do not realize that the process of deciding and applying for graduate school can be quite long. In fact, one should plan at least a full year in advance. Most of the preparation work should begin as early as your junior year or even possibly your sophomore year. Generally speaking, stronger graduate programs have earlier application deadlines and have higher "recommended" GRE scores for potential applicants.

The application process has three major components:

1. The first consists of all the steps you must take from deciding whether you would like to go to graduate school, to completing the application packet, to receiving your admissions letters. For very detailed discussion and helpful advice concerning these steps, consult the references listed below. Likewise, read the section on asking for recommendation letters found in this handbook.
2. The second major component is preparing for and taking the GRE tests. Besides the references provided below, consult the handbook's section on the GRE tests.
3. The third component refers to other preparations you can take to improve your chances for admission to graduate school. Because you will be asking for recommendation letters from faculty during your senior year, they should have the opportunity to get to know you well before that. Involvement in research or practicum experiences will enhance your credentials and are often the bases for recommendation and should be engaged in as early as your junior year. Thus, completing the statistics and research methods courses before or by your junior year is recommended. For more advice, see the books and websites below.

If you plan to enter graduate school immediately after finishing your undergraduate degree, a suggested timeline for going through the basic steps can be found at the end of this section.

Helpful Resources about the Process for Applying to Graduate School

Websites

[*Preparing and Applying for Graduate School in Psychology*](#) (Norcross & Hogan, 2015). "This series of 12 videos takes prospective graduate students step-by-step through the preparation, application, interview and admission processes. The presenters combine decades of advising experience and research findings with evidence-based and anxiety-reducing strategies for mastering each step."

Gradschools.com Search graduate programs by field of study, subject, and location. Includes information about how to fund your graduate education.

Books

Getting In, Second Edition (APA, 2007). Simplifies the process for applicants and increases their chances of being accepted. Useful timelines, tips, and tools break the tasks into manageable steps and help readers define their goals, select programs, and navigate the application process.

Insider's Guide to Graduate Programs in Clinical and Counseling Psychology (Sayette, Mayne, & Norcross, 2010). Includes advice about PhD vs. PsyD programs, selecting schools, applying to programs, mastering the interview, etc.

Graduate Study in Psychology (APA). The most comprehensive source of information regarding graduate programs in psychology, providing detailed information about hundreds of graduate programs in psychology in the U.S. and Canada. Copies of recent editions of this book can be checked out in the main office of the EIU Department of Psychology (PHYS 1151).

How do I get letters of recommendation from faculty?

Graduate admissions committees take letters of recommendation seriously because they provide information about you beyond the objective information that they can glean from your GRE scores and grades. These letters offer an overall account of your academic abilities and promise, and may weigh in a lot in the committees' decisions for admitting you. They ought to speak about a host of factors that indicate your potential for graduate schoolwork such as your intellectual ability, motivation, integrity, work ethic, creativity, capacity for independent thought, communication skills, research experience, general and special knowledge, leadership, and ability to work with others. As such, it is very important to choose recommenders who can describe you extensively and very positively on those elements. They must have had considerable contact with you and have been involved closely in your education, research activities, or practica/internships. Do not ask letters of recommendation from those who hardly know you academically, or those whose involvements with you are not within the academic context, including public officials, ministers, or therapists. Likewise, avoid those who will be perceived as being unable to give an objective portrayal of you, such as family, relatives, or friends. Lastly, do not ask letters from those who you anticipate will not give you a positive evaluation, or those who you believe will only harm your application. It is very helpful to consult the following article by Drew and Karen Appleby on the "[Kisses of Death](#)" in the graduate school application process.

Once you have picked out potential references, do not simply ask if they are willing to write a letter of recommendation for you. Ask if they believe they know you enough to write a strong one for you. Some professors may ask you to complete a form that they have created to gather more specific information about your goals, accomplishments, and academic interests. If the person you ask doesn't use a unique form, you can use the Department of Psychology's [standard form](#). On this form, you should complete the table that lists the schools you are applying to, the full titles of the graduate programs, the addresses for mailing, as well as the deadlines for the letters. Graduate schools vary on how they would like to receive the recommendation letters. Some require that the recommenders send the letters directly to them while others request that you include those letters in your application packet. Indicate this information in the summary table so that the recommender would know who to hand the letter.

When should I take the GRE?

Most graduate admissions committees require that you submit scores from the Graduate Record Examination (GRE). The GRE consists of the following: a General Test with three parts (verbal, quantitative, and analytical writing) and the Subject Test in Psychology. The latter will test your

knowledge of psychological theories and concepts while the General Test examines your general intellectual ability. Not all graduate programs ask for the Subject Test in Psychology.

It is very important to do well on these exams since they are often used as a predictor of your success in graduate school. Many graduate schools will tell you what minimum scores they require for admission, but you should expect that the minimum scores will fall in the upper 50th percentile range or higher. For detailed information about the content of the tests, visit <https://www.ets.org/gre.html>.

Because some deadlines for graduate school application begin as early as December, plan to take the GRE in October or November at the latest. It takes 10 – 15 days after taking the test for graduate schools to receive your General Test scores, while it takes about six weeks after taking the test for the Subject Test scores to be reported to you and to the schools. You must make sure that your scores will be available in time for your earliest admissions deadline.

The GRE test can also be taken more than once. Thus, you should take the exam early enough to have an opportunity to retake the test if needed. You can re-take the General Test only one time per month, and only five times in a year. November, December, and January are considered the busiest testing periods. Note that you need to register at least six weeks in advance for the Subject Test.

How do I prepare for the GRE?

Probably the first thing you should do, if you haven't already done so, is thoroughly review the GRE website. You'll see that they have a lot of free test prep materials, as well as some materials that you can buy. There's also a link to strategies and tips for taking the test.

The most popular sources for GRE prep information are the Princeton Review, Kaplan, PowerScore, and Barron's.

Timeline for Graduate School Preparation

YEAR	TERM	APPLICATION ACTIVITIES	GRE TESTS	OTHER PREPARATIONS
Junior	Fall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide on whether you need to go to graduate school. • Decide on area of specialization in psychology. • Decide on whether you'd like to obtain a master's or doctoral degree. • Research various graduate programs. • Research financial aid information. • Identify graduate faculty you might like to work with. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain information about the GRE Tests. • Study for the GRE Tests. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain research and/or practicum experience. • Take recommended classes for graduate school (see section on what classes to take in the handbook)
	Spring		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Register for taking the GRE Tests. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain research and/or practicum experience. • Take recommended classes for graduate school (see section on what classes to take in the handbook)
	Summer		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take the GRE Tests. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain research and/or practicum experience. • Take recommended classes for graduate school (see section on what classes to take in the handbook)
Senior	Fall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Request for application forms. • Ask for recommendation letters. • Request for copies of transcripts. • Write your personal statement/statement of interest/autobiographical statement. • Send off applications for Fall deadlines. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Last chance to take or re-take the GRE Tests. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain research and/or practicum experience. • Take recommended classes for graduate school (see section on what classes to take in the handbook)
	Spring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Send off applications for Spring deadlines. • Go for interviews (if applicable). • Receive admissions letters. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain research and/or practicum experience. • Take recommended classes for graduate school (see section on what classes to take in the handbook)

References

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Where can I go for more help?

We hope you have found this handbook to be a valuable resource to help guide you successfully in your experience as a psychology major. If you have questions that are not answered in this handbook, please contact us. Finally, here are some links to other helpful resources at EIU:

- [Office of the Registrar](#) (for AP/CLEP credit, transfer information, transcripts, forms, etc.)
- [Office of Financial Aid](#)
- [Getting started with Study Abroad](#)
- [Electronic Writing Portfolio](#)
- [Student Resources](#)



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