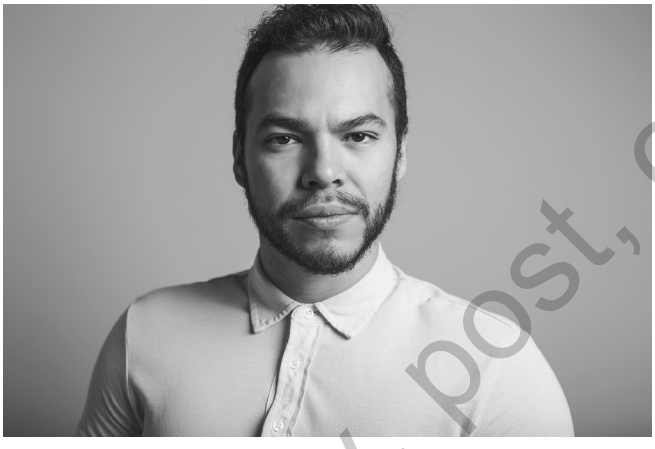
Navigating the Psychology Curriculum and Meeting Your Professors

4

4.0 MEET P.J.



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CHAPTER OUTLINE

4.0 Meet P.J.

4.1 Typical Psychology Courses

4.2 Skills You Develop as a Psychology Major

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P.J. was a high achiever and liked the idea of helping people, so when he started college he had interests in choosing psychology as his major. However, P.J.'s parents pushed him to major in something (they believed) practical on his way to a potentially high-paying career. Because his parents could be persuasive (and because they were paying some of his tuition), P.J. decided to pursue a career in medicine and major in biology (like most pre-med students).

When P.J. met with an academic advisor to declare his major and learn about the courses he would need, they talked about his goals and interests. P.J. was surprised to hear that, with a little bit of planning, it would make sense for him to double-major in biology and psychology. The academic advisor opened P.J.'s eyes as to how and why this made sense for him.

First, P.J. learned that double-majoring was not that unusual—as long as one's course schedule was planned out carefully, it was still possible to finish all of the requirements in 4 years. Second, P.J. learned that psychology was an important part of being a pre-med student—the updated version of the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) has a significant portion devoted to psychology topics. Third, the academic advisor told P.J. that, whereas mastering the biology content (e.g., anatomy) was important for a career in medicine, the best doctors were the ones who knew how to connect with and clearly communicate with patients.

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Why Did We Tell You This Story?

A lot of students tell us that they enjoy psychology but that they also have other interests. In this chapter, we cover the areas that can be explored and the skills that can be developed as a psychology student—we also consider possibilities for how students can combine their interest in psychology with other areas (e.g., adding a minor or second major). Finally, we emphasize the importance of learning from (and communicating professionally with) your professors as well as an academic advisor.

4.1 TYPICAL PSYCHOLOGY COURSES

According to faculty, understanding the psychology curriculum might be one of the most important topics for students (Landrum, Shoemaker, & Davis, 2003). Our students agree, as they have made it clear to us that they want to have a better understanding of what psychology courses they are likely going to take as an undergraduate. In this module, we will talk about psychology courses broadly, so keep in mind that the specific courses at your institution might be a little bit different. Also, because there is not much of a distinction between psychology programs that award a Bachelor of Arts and those which award a Bachelor of Science (Pfund et al., 2016), we will not make any distinctions here.

The Psychology Curriculum

As with most college majors, courses in the psychology curriculum are categorized into levels (e.g., 100, 200, 300, and 400 levels). A general rule of thumb is that courses with a higher numerical value, for example, the 400 level, will be more difficult and demanding than those at the lower levels. Also, as a general rule, students should take the courses at the lower levels before the courses at the upper levels.

General Psychology and Introduction to the Psychology Major

The psychology sequence begins with General Psychology (e.g., "PSY 101")—this course provides a broad overview of psychology content areas, landmark studies, and current streams of thought (e.g., Gurung et al., 2016). It is common for General Psychology courses to introduce students to psychological research through a lab section (e.g., Peterson & Sesma, 2017) or participation in research studies (e.g., Rocchi, Beaudry, Anderson, & Pelletier, 2016). In addition to PSY 101, some programs offer an Introduction to the Psychology Major course that provides advice for what students can do to get the most out of their psychology experience and become viable candidates for jobs or graduate school (Roscoe & McMahan, 2014). If an instructor has you read this book, then you are likely in one of these courses.

Stats and Methods—Important (and Underappreciated)

After PSY 101, there are typically a few required courses for most psychology students: Statistics and Research Methods. In Statistics, you will learn different quantitative

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approaches that are used to analyze research data. For example, you can learn about detecting patterns in data sets and whether a specific clinical treatment is effective or not. For Statistics, it will probably help if you have adequate training in college algebra beforehand.

In Research Methods, you will learn the proper methods of conducting a scientific research study in psychology. You will also learn how to write an APA-style research paper. Do not be intimidated by this, though; your instructor will walk you through it. Also, if you are lucky, you may be able to conduct your own mini-experiment in this class.

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In our view, it is important to take Statistics and Research Methods early because they help prepare you for many other psychology courses—an understanding of statistics and methods will allow you to better understand the psychological theories and research taught in your other psychology courses. Knowledge of statistics and methods is also useful in your everyday life. How many times have you heard news stories that report a correlation (sometimes described as a relation between two things) or perhaps a claim that one thing causes another (see Vigen, 2015)? With knowledge of statistics and research methods, you can better judge how believable these claims are and make better life choices.

Another point we must make about statistics is that some people avoid it because they may have a little bit of math anxiety (Ashcraft & Moore, 2009). Keep in mind that most (or all) college students can develop quantitative skills with a little bit of effort (see our discussion of mindsets in another chapter). Even if others pick it up more quickly, that does not mean that you *cannot* do math. Indeed, one of the biggest mistakes that students make about math is giving up without trying (Dweck, 2006). We will refrain from inserting an inspirational quote here, but do your best to embrace the challenge of learning!

Psychology Foundation and Elective Courses

Moving on in the curriculum, there is typically a set of foundational or core courses that cover the major research domains in psychology. According to Norcross and colleagues' (2016) summary, 90% of programs offer courses that cover the following areas:

- Abnormal Psychology—psychological disorders
- Cognitive Psychology—how people think and remember
- Developmental Psychology—how children and adults change throughout life
- Personality—how people's traits contribute to behavior

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- Physiological Psychology/Neuroscience—explore the brain's structure and functions
- Social Psychology—how people interact and affect others.

At many schools, students have a little bit of freedom to choose elective courses to complete their psychology requirements. Most institutions offer a wide variety of courses, and the specific topics may depend on (a) the expertise and interests of the faculty and (b) how popular the course is with students. Some schools may organize courses into "tracks" that are organized around major areas, such as clinical psychology, neuroscience, or development.

Navigating Through Psychology's Subfields

One thing that you likely noticed about psychology is that it is a very broad field consisting of a large number of subfields. In fact, the American Psychological Association (APA) lists over 50 different divisions that focus on different subfields! We list some of the subfields of psychology in Table 4.1, but keep in mind that this is not exhaustive and that some areas can be broken down even further.

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Some students can feel overwhelmed by the variety of areas in psychology—should you take courses involving neuroscience, development, or psychological disorders? If you know which area interests you the most, then take courses in that area. For example, if you are pursuing a career where you will work with children, then look for courses related to developmental psychology (or perhaps child behavior issues).

However, if you are unsure, then our advice is to read about the different areas (as a starting point, go to www.apa.org and search for "divisions") and to sample courses to see if any pique your interest. You might also speak with an academic advisor or professor. Learning more about the subfields is important because your impression of an area might be different than what it actually involves. After you learn more about the subfields, you can either choose one area to focus on or you can take a breadth approach and fill your schedules with courses from different areas of psychology (this is perfectly fine—a lot of students take this approach). One of the best parts of the breadth approach is that, as you progress through your courses, you can take key findings from different areas and apply them to your life and career preparation!

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TABLE 4.1

A Sample of the Subfields of Psychology (Listed Alphabetically)

Clinical psychology	Cognitive psychology
Consumer psychology	Counseling psychology
Culture, ethnicity, and race	Developmental psychology
Educational psychology	Engineering psychology
Environmental psychology	Evolutionary psychology
Experimental psychology	Forensic psychology
Gender and sexuality	General psychology
Health psychology	Humanistic psychology
Industrial and organizational psychology	Media psychology and technology
Military psychology	Neuropsychology
Neuroscience and comparative psychology	Pediatric psychology
Perception	Personality
Psycholinguistics	Psychopharmacology and substance abuse
Psychotherapy	Quantitative and qualitative methods
Rehabilitation psychology	Religion and spirituality
School psychology	Social psychology
Sport psychology	

Unique Courses

At some institutions, one thing to watch out for is the special topics seminar that occasionally pops up on the schedule. There also tend to be some variable credit courses available. For example, if students get involved with research, they might be able to sign up for research credits. Also, some students might find an opportunity to take a Directed Readings course or Independent Study course—for these, you typically meet with a professor on a regular basis by yourself (or with a very small group of students) to discuss articles or a topic that is not covered in an existing course.

Finally, most psychology programs have a senior-level capstone—this might be an experience (e.g., involvement in the community, a unique project, working on research) or a class. If it is a course, it may focus on having students integrate what they have learned throughout the major and reinforcing their skills in some way. Sometimes the course will be in a seminar format, in which students will explore a specific and unique topic. Other times, it will be centered around the creation of a research project. Regardless of the format, the capstone is a nice way to wrap up your major and prepare for your next steps!

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TABLE 4.2

Example Plan for Undergraduate Psychology Majors

This is a general timeline for students at our institutions. Because your institution's requirements may be different, we strongly encourage you to *write out the plan for you*! If you need help, work with an academic advisor.

FRESHMAN YEAR

- Courses:
  - General Psychology, Introduction to the Psychology Major
  - General university requirements
- Summer Activities (after this year):
  - Meet with an advisor and catch up on courses if you fell behind
  - Decide if psychology is the right major for you
  - Decide whether you want to pursue a minor or second major

SOPHOMORE YEAR

- Courses:
  - Statistics, Research Methods, psychology foundational and elective courses
  - General university requirements
  - Courses for minor or second major (if applicable)
- Summer Activities (after this year):
  - Meet with an advisor and catch up on courses if you fell behind
  - Look into opportunities such as internships, research, or study abroad

JUNIOR YEAR

- Courses:
  - Psychology foundational and elective courses
  - General university requirements
  - Courses for minor or second major (if applicable)
- Summer Activities (after this year):
  - Meet with an advisor and catch up on courses if you fell behind
  - Look into opportunities such as internships, research, or study abroad

SENIOR YEAR

- Courses:
  - Psychology Senior Capstone, psychology electives
  - General university requirements
  - Courses for minor or second major (if applicable)
- Summer (after this year):
  - Take your next steps (e.g., job or graduate school)!

Take-Home Message

The courses you take in psychology, and the order in which you take them, are carefully designed by expert faculty (see Table 4.2 for an example from our institutions).

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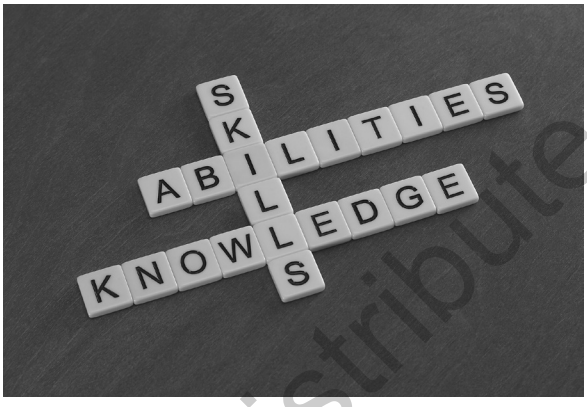
Thus, do your best to adhere to your institutional policies and program recommendations so you can get the most out of your degree program. Also, be sure to keep an eye out for the "unsung" courses (e.g., Statistics and Research Methods) and opportunities you can take advantage of in the summer. Although we covered the basics of the psychology curriculum, keep in mind that your institution is likely to offer some exciting courses based on the expertise of your faculty!



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Action Steps

1. If your psychology program or institution's undergraduate catalog provides a roadmap of what to take each year to keep on track, save it, print it out, and add notes to it. We recommend building your own course plan, similar to what we did in Table 4.2.
2. Find out if your institution offers summer psychology courses. If they *do*, make plans to maintain your academic progress through the warmer months of the year. One word of caution, though—do not overdo it with classes over the summer! One or two courses is probably a good number—we have seen some students burn out after taking too many summer courses.

4.2 SKILLS YOU DEVELOP AS A PSYCHOLOGY MAJOR

As we noted earlier in this book, one of the big misconceptions about college is that the ultimate goal is to get through the required courses with the least amount of effort as possible. But consider this—have you ever stopped to wonder how many people are earning college degrees today? A college degree used to mean that you were part of an elite group of educated people—but, in today's world, a bachelor's degree is much more common, meaning that the degree alone will not make you stand out from the crowd. So, let's change your approach to college. In addition to building a knowledge base, let's focus on developing skills as well.


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Learning Outcomes

When it comes to what learning outcomes you should take away from the psychology major, the go-to resource is the *APA Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major* (American Psychological Association, 2013). You might be surprised to learn that only

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TABLE 4.3

APA Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major

1. Knowledge Base in Psychology "Students should demonstrate fundamental knowledge and comprehension of the major concepts, theoretical perspectives, historical trends, and empirical findings to discuss how psychological principles apply to behavioral problems" (American Psychological Association, 2013, p. 17).
2. Scientific Inquiry and Critical Thinking "The skills in this domain involve the development of scientific reasoning and problem solving, including effective research methods" (American Psychological Association, 2013, p. 20).
3. Ethical and Social Responsibility in a Diverse World "The skills in this domain involve the development of ethically and socially responsible behaviors for professional and personal settings in a landscape that involves increasing diversity" (American Psychological Association, 2013, p. 26).
4. Communication "Students should demonstrate competence in writing and in oral and interpersonal communication skills" (American Psychological Association, 2013, p. 30).
5. Professional Development "The emphasis in this goal is on application of psychology-specific content and skills, effective self-reflection, project management skills, teamwork skills and career preparation" (American Psychological Association, 2013, p. 33).

one of the five guidelines (#1—"Knowledge Base in Psychology") is related to content knowledge—the rest focus on skill development (see Table 4.3). This means that you will be developing skills as you progress through the psychology major (Hettich, 2014). In the following sections, we go through each of the recommendations and skills highlighted in the guidelines (and most of the skills are also discussed further elsewhere in this book).

Knowledge Base in Psychology

As we noted in the previous module, you are going to take different psychology courses that cover a variety of topics. Not only will you be learning facts, but you will also be learning about theories and underlying themes. We are not going to spend much time on this guideline, though, as earlier chapters in this book addressed study skills and adopting a deep learning mindset that can help in this area. Instead, we are going to spend more time building on the other four learning outcomes set forth by APA by presenting several skills and tendencies you should work toward developing.

Scientific Inquiry and Critical Thinking

Interpreting and Critiquing Information. This skill is extremely important—not just for a career, but also in life. Adopt a critical thinking mindset and do not simply take other people's word for things—interpret the evidence for yourself. Critical thinkers will investigate an issue using logic, thinking probabilistically, looking for evidence, and examining the trustworthiness of a source (e.g., Nisbett, 2015). Using

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these strategies, a critical thinker can determine whether a claim is likely to be true, false, or untestable. For example, you may have heard claims that childhood vaccines cause autism. Is that true? You could approach this from a number of angles. One approach is to look at the credibility of the source of the claim (celebrities) versus the credibility of a source that denies the claim (scientists). Another approach is to look at evidence in research studies that have examined the issue (e.g., Flaherty's 2011 article entitled *The Vaccine-Autism Connection: A Public Health Crisis Caused by Unethical Medical Practices and Fraudulent Science*).

Analyzing Data. We were disappointed to learn that Statistics is rated as one of the least popular college courses (Newman, 2017). This is unfortunate because data and statistical analyses are a core component of the field of psychology, as they help us gather evidence about human behavior and abilities (Feldman, 2017). From a practical perspective, with so much data about people available to technology companies today (e.g., Singer, 2018), people who can analyze data are in demand. As technology continues to evolve, it will likely be able to gather even more detail about all of us. In this modern world, the ability to code, analyze, and interpret data is a skill that you should develop, not one you should avoid! So, embrace a statistics course, and consider taking more than one (see Friedrich, Childress, & Cheng, 2018 for a discussion of what can be learned in statistics courses).

Ethical and Social Responsibility in a Diverse World

Ethics. When it comes to ethics, sometimes learning what *not* to do can be just as important as learning what you *should* do. For example, in the context of psychological research, most students learn about ethically questionable studies such as Watson and Rayner's (1920) *Little Albert* study or Zimbardo and colleagues' *Stanford Prison* study (see Zimbardo, 2007). As a result of studies like these, psychologists have agreed to adopt a system that includes ethical safeguards, such as informed consent. It is important for students to learn to treat others with respect and recognize what is not acceptable (see our discussion of ethics in another chapter).

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Ideally, institutions of higher education should be intellectually challenging learning spaces. College students should find themselves engaging in new and different experiences and encountering points of view different from their own. If this has not been the case yet, what are you waiting for? Step out of your comfort zone, try something new, or do something differently. For instance, listen to a speaker on a topic you know nothing about, sit with a classmate you have yet to meet, or take that obscure elective course (rather than the easy one). Your college or university is a learning community where you can witness diversity of thought, so be sure to engage in it!

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It is also important to remember that higher education is a microcosm of society. You will encounter people of many ethnic and gender identities, varied socioeconomic statuses, and different personalities. Because of these factors and life experiences, the people you meet are likely to hold worldviews different from your own. Thus, it is important to learn as much as you can about diverse groups and how their personal histories shape how they experience life. As a psychology student, you will work alongside students who come from backgrounds different from your own. Take advantage of this rich experience—college life can be a whole lot of fun if you embrace it.

Communication

Writing. Good writing not only conveys a positive first impression, but it is also a skill useful in almost any high-paying job. Writing is a way to communicate your ideas, and good writing can be interpreted as a sign of education and competence. Imagine reading an article that is filled with spelling and grammar mistakes—sure, you can tolerate it, but those errors can possibly influence how you process the content of the message.

Despite what some of you may think, we are not born either with or without writing talent—writing is a skill that is developed through practice. Much like our earlier advice about math—the key idea here is the word *practice*! Unfortunately, we see a lot of students either try to avoid writing classes completely or, if that is not possible, they spend the least amount of time possible on writing assignments. This is the wrong approach—in college, take advantage of the safe space to write more! So, instead of whipping up a paper the night before it is due, start it a week early, ask your professor for feedback, and then use that feedback to make the final product even better. By doing that, you will be one step ahead of your fellow students when it comes to improving your writing.

Speaking/Presenting. Writing is not the only way to communicate your ideas—you also need to be proficient at speaking and presenting (something that you have to do in a lot of jobs). As with writing, college is a great time to practice this skill. If the thought of class presentations makes you anxious, consider this: When you give a presentation in a college class, your audience consists of students who are not paying attention because they are bored and students who are nervous about their own presentation. When we put it like this, is there any reason to be intimidated by that audience? So, do not avoid those classes that include presentations—use them as an opportunity to improve your presentation skills (and use our other presentation tips that we cover in a later chapter).

Professional Development

Hard Work and Perseverance. The simplest skill, but probably one of the most difficult to implement, is to work hard. If you want to get better at something, then practice it! You can get better at almost anything by working at it. We are sure that most of you will agree with that advice, but how many of you regularly follow it? As a starting point,

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use the anti-procrastination efforts we described back in Chapter 1!

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Acceptance of Failure. If you never fail, it probably means that you are never putting yourself in a position where you might fail. As we note in Chapter 3, failure is okay as long as you learn from it and grow. If you need more evidence that failure is not a recipe to a lifetime of disaster, check out any of the various articles online about successful people who have experienced failure in their lives (e.g., LoCascio, 2016).

How to Work in Groups. A lot of students tell us that they dislike group projects. However, keep in mind that many tasks in the work-world are too difficult to accomplish by oneself, and some tasks require the contributions of different specialists. Also, bosses or managers likely do not want the success of a project to depend solely on one person; instead, they assign projects to a team. All of these factors contribute to the likelihood that you will work as part of a group during your career. So, take time in college to learn how to work productively with others.

Complete Work on Time. We find that there are students who hate deadlines—some may even resort to calling them "arbitrary" or "pointless" when they fall behind in a course. However, there are other students who turn assignments in on time and would think it is unfair if other students are allowed to turn them in late. In other words, professors like us cannot win whether we try to enforce deadlines or we try to be lax when students need more time. Although there are arguments in favor of (e.g., Kreuter, 2012) or against (e.g., Boucher, 2016) the enforcement of deadlines in college, we want you to take a minute to imagine the following scenarios.

Imagine that you (or your company) are competing with others—this can be anything, such as creating a product or providing a service. In this competitive environment, who is more likely to win, the person on time or the person lagging behind? Imagine that it is April 15 and your taxes are due—do you think the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) thinks that it is important to submit your taxes on time (here is a hint—there are financial penalties for filing late)? Imagine that 200 people are applying for a spot in a clinical psychology graduate program—with so many applicants to choose from, do you think the admissions committee cares much about an application that arrives a week late?

Our point here is that, like it or not, deadlines matter in different aspects of life. While in college, it is probably a good idea to get used to completing work on time. But, you can breathe easier knowing that most professors are willing to make exceptions for extreme circumstances or emergencies.

Take-Home Message

As we noted previously, look for courses and other opportunities that can help you develop these skills—these are opportunities for you to improve. Also, keep in

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mind that the skills covered in this module are not a complete list—there are plenty of other practical skills that might be important for you. For example, you could learn (a) a foreign language, (b) how to program, (c) how to budget and manage your own finances, (d) accounting information to run your own business, (e) how to persuade others, (f) how to improve your memory, (g) how to appreciate art, (h) how to negotiate, or any other skill that is important to you!

Action Steps

1. Review the actual APA Guidelines 2.0 (American Psychological Association, 2013). Pay close attention to the "Attributes Inferred From Successful Demonstration" section of the learning outcomes (e.g., Curious, Open-Minded, Precise). Determine several attributes you would like to possess and be able to demonstrate. Revisit this list periodically to determine whether it still fits your personal goals and whether you are intentionally working toward these attributes.
2. Once you have determined this initial list, jot down some opportunities to develop these attributes. Here is a tip—take a look at your course syllabi (most professors include student learning outcomes)!

4.3 DOUBLE-MAJORING OR PICKING UP A MINOR

Except for some rare circumstances, all college students have a major—in some cases, it might be a broad term like "interdisciplinary studies," but it is a focus nonetheless. In addition to a major, some students will complete a minor, and some high achievers may complete two majors (e.g., Del Rossi & Hersch, 2016; Pitt & Tepper, 2012). Should you consider a minor or double-major? You might think to yourself, "That sounds like a lot of work—I can barely get through one major. Why would I ever need to do that?" Well, a minor or double-major is not for everyone, but in many circumstances it can be a helpful addition. In this module we cover some pros and cons of minors and second majors as well as some tips for picking one that can complement your psychology major.

Reasons for a Minor or Second Major

We list some of the reasons for adding a minor or second major in Table 4.4. One reason is that there can be complementary knowledge and skills that can be developed from two areas (e.g., Pitt & Tepper, 2012). The thinking is that this can potentially help with jobs or graduate school applications (e.g., Slatalla, 2008). An example of this

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TABLE 4.4

Top Reasons for Adding a Minor or Second Major

- Two areas can better prepare you for a career or graduate school
- Build practical skills
- You have an interest in more than one area

would be to combine psychology and biology for someone who is planning to attend medical school—biology will provide you with the foundation for understanding anatomy and diseases and then psychology can help you to better understand people.

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There are also cases where students choose a major because they like it but then realize that it is not necessarily the most practical major for getting a good job (e.g., Zafar, 2011). In these cases, they can pair that major with another field (that is believed to be practical for getting a job). For example, you might have a passion for art history, but you might recognize that there are likely more job opportunities in business. In this case, you could combine both to get a balance between passion and practicality.

Along this line, one recent study showed that a double-major of a liberal arts major (like psychology) combined with either business or a STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) field led to higher incomes than having just a liberal arts major (Makridis, 2017).

Finally, if you are like most psychology majors, then you have a passion for psychology—but some of you may also enjoy a second, related topic area. For example, perhaps you are fascinated by music or Shakespeare. A minor or second major in that second area can be a way for you to explore both of those interests.

Which to Add—A Minor or Second Major?

The reality is that adding a minor or second major means that you have more required courses to complete. However, with some careful planning, you may be able to use the minor or second major courses to fulfill your institution's elective requirements (e.g., general education). This is indeed possible, as one study showed that students who double-major do not take any longer to graduate than those with a single major (Del Rossi & Hersch, 2016)! The key is to plan it out, and we strongly recommend that you meet regularly with an academic advisor to get help (we have more tips about meeting with academic advisors later in this module).

Adding a second major is going to be more complex than adding a minor, so adding a minor may be more feasible for most students. Also, keep in mind that, if you double-major, you may spread yourself too thin and you may not be able to reach the levels of success that you could reach if you only focused on one area. For example, if you are busy taking additional courses for a second major, you may not have time to get involved with superstar

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activities that can prepare you for life after graduation (Pitt & Tepper, 2012). With a minor, you can still have time for those activities.

Choosing a Minor or Second Major

Choosing a minor or second major depends on your interests and goals. Students with goals to start their own therapy practice may consider combining psychology with business. Students interested in a cognitive science graduate program might look at a complementary topic such as neuroscience or philosophy. As we noted earlier, some students may simply want to complete a minor in something that they find interesting.

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Finally, others might want to develop a skill—theater or public speaking might be good to practice speaking in front of groups, computer science might help with programming, and a foreign language might prepare you to work within new settings.

One way to consider how a minor or second major might complement your psychology major is to have a discussion with an advisor or professor about how the two fields are connected (e.g., Sadigh, 2017). For example, you could ask yourself a question such as, "How will a minor in ___ make me a better worker in my intended career field?" Table 4.5 contains some examples of how you can combine psychology with another area—please note that this is not a complete list as there are a lot of other combinations that you could choose. Search your school's catalog and website for a list of minors or majors to see a complete list of options.

TABLE 4.5

Possible Topics for a Second Major or Minor for Various Career Areas

Career Area → Combine Your Psychology Major with this Second Major/Minor
Cognitive Science → Neuroscience or Philosophy
Computers/Programming → Computer Science
Counseling → Counseling or Human Services
Entrepreneur → Business or Entrepreneurship
Forensics → Criminal Justice
Human Factors → Engineering
Law → Political Science or History or Criminal Justice
Law Enforcement → Criminal Justice
Linguistics → Foreign Language
Management → Business
Marketing → Marketing
Medicine → Biology or Chemistry
Neuroscience → Neuroscience

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Public Speaking → Theater or Public Speaking
Sales → Hospitality or Communication
Social Worker → Social Work
Teaching → Education
Therapist → Marriage and Family Therapy
Therapist w/own practice → Business or Accounting
Treatment → Addictions
Writing/Journalism → English or Communication

Take-Home Message

If you do not complete a minor or double-major, is it going to derail your post-graduation plans? Of course not—as we noted earlier, we are not recommending this for everyone. In many cases, immersing yourself completely into your psychology major will help you prepare for your future. However, adding a minor or second major can have advantages. For example, (a) you can explore two different topic areas, (b) you can build additional skills and knowledge that can better prepare you for your future career, and (c) it could possibly be a tie-breaker in your favor if your fellow job or graduate school applicants are evenly matched with you (but did not do it). Also, with so many elective credits required for graduation, why not fill those by exploring a topic area in more depth rather than taking a bunch of unrelated elective courses?

Action Steps

1. Consider whether a minor, or possibly a second major, makes sense for you. Think about your interests and career possibilities. Think about whether two fields would complement each other nicely.
2. Make an appointment with an advisor to discuss the practical scheduling issues about adding a minor or second major. For example, would you have to take summer courses or delay graduation in order to finish all of the requirements?

4.4 MEET YOUR PROFESSORS

In this book, we regularly encourage you to improve yourself by doing well in your courses. But, we also want to encourage you to do more outside of class as well. In this module we are going to walk you through the value of meeting your professors. As a preview, one reason is to get help when you are struggling. It is also recommended that college students find a mentor to listen and possibly share advice—this can be a professor who helps to guide you through college or prepare for your future or to assist in an activity such as research (e.g., Ritzer, 2018). The good news is that most professors truly are enthusiastic about helping students (e.g., Vernon, 2018a). But, first, we want to give you a little background about the different types of faculty (including the variety of job titles you might see) and the different

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responsibilities included in their jobs (in addition to teaching). The better you understand the lives of professors, the better prepared you will be when you meet with them.

Different Types of Faculty

Before starting college, you might have had a stereotype of professors being middle-aged or older with an affinity for tweed clothing. But, if you have taken a handful of college courses, then you know that this is just a stereotype and not reality. Like many occupations, professors have diverse backgrounds—they can be young or old, they can come from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and some may have even been first-generation college students (e.g., Whitaker, 2018). However, one thing that they tend to have in common is that they are well educated (Clauset, Arbesman, & Larremore, 2015).

Full-Time Faculty. In higher education, there are typically two broad categories of instructors—full-time and part-time faculty (e.g., Hailstorks, Stamm, Norcross, Pfund, & Christidis, 2019). Most full-time professors have an advanced degree (many have a PhD), and you will likely find these professors listed on the department or college website with a little blurb about their area of expertise, degree(s), and job title. Full-time faculty members can have a variety of titles (see Table 4.6). It is important to note that, no matter the title, these individuals are all professors—the different titles refer to subtle differences in their roles or their accomplishments. For example, newly hired faculty are often Assistant Professors, then after years of experience they might be promoted to Associate Professor or Professor.

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In addition, many full-time faculty members can earn tenure by establishing a solid record of work. Although the expectations for tenure can vary at different institutions, tenure essentially means that a professor cannot be fired for arbitrary reasons. This gives tenured professors the academic freedom to teach or conduct scholarly work on unpopular, sensitive, or controversial topics without fear of political repercussions.

Part-Time Faculty. The second category of professors includes part-time or adjunct instructors. These individuals typically have advanced degrees (but sometimes they are graduate students who are still completing their degree), have a focus on teaching, but are not permanent members of the faculty. However, just because they are not full-time, that does not mean that they are any less knowledgeable or capable in the classroom—everyone

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TABLE 4.6

A Variety of Job Titles That You May See for Full- and Part-Time College Faculty

Full-Time Faculty
• Assistant Professor
• Associate Professor
• Professor
• Lecturer
• Faculty in Residence
Part-Time Faculty
• Part-Time Instructor
• Instructor
• Adjunct Professor
• Visiting Professor
• Graduate Student

who is hired to teach a college course has expertise in that subject area (see Table 4.6 for various job titles for part-time faculty).

What Faculty Do

Many people who have never been to college think that professors live an easy life—show up to campus a few times a week to teach (or possibly conduct an online course from home)—but the reality is that professors have a lot of responsibilities. Although most part-time faculty focus on teaching, most full-time faculty divide their efforts among three areas: teaching, conducting scientific research, and service responsibilities (e.g., designing the psychology curriculum, critiquing articles for peer-reviewed journals). However, the emphasis of these areas differs depending on their job expectations and the type of institution where they work.

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At a research university, there are more expectations that professors regularly publish research articles and present their research at conferences. At liberal arts or community colleges, most professors focus on being excellent teachers first, but they may also be expected to provide undergraduate students regular opportunities to get involved in research. Of course, there are always going to be exceptions to these descriptions, but this

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is a general distinction to help you better understand the jobs of professors (see Vernon, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d, 2019, for a series of articles that describe the work lives of professors).

Why Meet Your Professors?

We think that it is important for students to build professional relationships and friendships with their professors (e.g., Newport, 2005). Professors often know about opportunities for students in your major—this might be a funding announcement, a research opening, or an award that would be a good fit for you. If you are struggling in class, you can ask your professor for help. Professors can also provide graduate school or career advice. Finally, professors might have connections with people that might be helpful for you—they may know former students who are working in the community or a professor at a graduate program where you are applying. We could keep going on, but hopefully you get our point!

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How to Meet Your Professors

Some students tell us that they are shy and are not confident approaching a professor—some even tell us that they think of professors as intimidating (e.g., Olatunji, 2000). But remember that professors are human beings just like you—and a lot of professors are also shy (or, in our case, a little bit nerdy). The good news is that most professors are friendly and are willing to talk if you give them a chance. A lot of psychology professors pride themselves on not only being excellent in the classroom, but also having qualities such as being approachable, accessible, and good listeners (Keeley, Ismail, & Buskist, 2016).

One of the best ways to meet your professors is to stop by during their office hours (e.g., Condis, 2016). If their office hours overlap with your classes, you can email a professor to schedule a time for a meeting. Office meetings are great because the professor can spend time focusing on your questions or providing help. There are many different things that you can talk about—ask for clarification about a tricky concept from class; ask if there are any books that they recommend so that you can learn more about a class topic; you could even discuss a movie that relates to a class topic. If you are not good at initiating conversations, you can ask something like this:

- "I want to learn more about internship opportunities, but I do not know how to start."
- "I read about your research on your website—are you taking new research assistants?"

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- "I am interested in graduate school. What did you do to prepare and learn about graduate school when you were a psychology major?"

If you have a specific question you want to talk about, then go ahead and approach that topic. But, if not, go ahead and try any of the topics we listed. However, we do have one request—please be authentic. That is, only ask about a topic that you have genuine interest in—do not feign interest in a topic.

A final point here is that, if you have a quick question, you could also try to catch a professor before or after class. However, be aware that, whereas some professors are okay with this, others may not have much time to chat because they are pressed for time (e.g., they are making last-minute preparations for class, they have to run off to teach another class, they have to attend a meeting, etc.). So please cut them some slack if they seem busy—try to catch them during office hours when they have that time set aside for students.

Take-Home Message

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So, why did we provide so much detail about professors?

First, there are many misconceptions about what professors actually do—especially outside of the classroom. Second, and more importantly, this little peek behind the curtain will allow you to better understand and connect with your professors. Talking with your professors and building professional relationships with them can be very helpful—this is true if your goal is to work after college or if you are thinking about graduate school. And, as an added bonus, you just might find that some of your professors are very interesting people!

Action Steps

1. Check out your school's department or college website and see the different titles and positions held by the different faculty members. If the job titles at your institution are not clear to you, ask one of your professors to explain them.
2. If you want to understand professors even more, watch interviews from university professor Dr. Bill Buskist (http://youtu.be/8vmboTEFHrk) and community college professor Dr. Saundra Ciccarelli (http://youtu.be/NTdbhLVG6eA). Listen for some of the common themes and differences between professors at these different types of institutions.
3. Select a professor (or more than one) that you would like to talk with and make a plan—are you going to approach him or her after your next class? Are you going to email him or her right now to request an office appointment? Set it up!

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4.5 COMMUNICATING WITH PROFESSORS (AND OTHERS)

In this module we want to help you interact with professors by going over the basics of professional communication. Importantly, the advice in this module can be generalized to communication in many other life situations, such as the workplace. We are going to cover how to address professors, how to communicate with professors, and exceptions to these guidelines. We know that some of you may want to skip this module because you think it is beneath you, but we implore you to please read this carefully and apply our tips!

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Using Formal Titles

Consider these scenarios: If you had an opportunity to meet one of your state's senators, would you greet her with, "Hey Diane, what's up?" If you were in the military and asked if you understood a set of orders, would you reply with, "I got it, Bob!"? Or would you respond with, "Yes, Sergeant!"? We hope that you see our point here is that you should address people formally, as a sign of respect and acknowledgment of their position or education.

College professors are experts in their fields, and most have earned an advanced degree (Stoloff, Sanders, & McCarthy, 2005)—this could be a master's, PhD (Doctor of Philosophy), PsyD (Doctor of Psychology), JD (Juris Doctor), or MD (Doctor of Medicine). Because most professors have an advanced degree, it is polite to refer to them as Professor Houska or Dr. Houska rather than as Mr. Houska.[1] Because "Doctor" is commonly used for medical doctors, we recommend using "Professor" as your go-to-title (but either is okay). Just be sure to use these respectful titles for all professors, no matter their gender or age (e.g., Gulliver, 2014).

Please be aware that you will find that different professors have different preferences about how to address them (e.g., Kreuter, 2011). Some may not care how you address them, some might make subtle suggestions (e.g., "Welcome to class—I am Professor Copeland"), some might encourage you to use their first name, and some might not tell you anything. To help you navigate through all of this, use the flowchart in Figure 4.1 for good rules-of-thumb as to how to address your professors.

Basic Communication Guidelines

Although you may find the occasional professor who accepts text messages, most of the time you will be communicating with them via email (or possibly a phone call).

[1]As a quick side note, you may think that Mrs. and Mr. are short for Missus and Mister, respectively; but, historically, those two abbreviations corresponded to Mistress (did you ever wonder why there was an "r" in that abbreviation?) and Master. After learning that, do you really want to refer to your professor as either Mistress or Master? Professor or Doctor sounds a lot better now, right? Anyway, it's a sign of respect, so we recommend using these terms.

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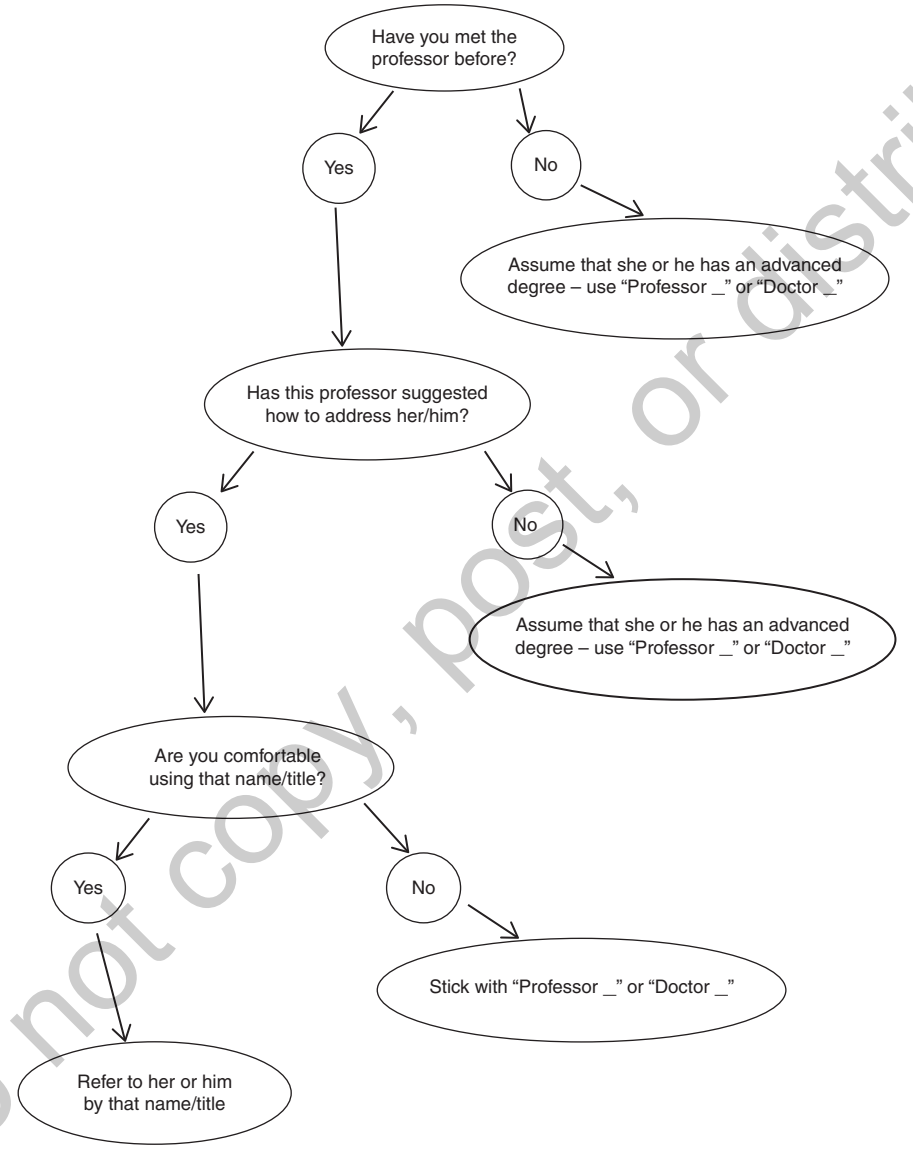
FIGURE 4.1

How to Address Your College Professors (In Person or via Email). Different Professors May Have Different Preferences, but This Chart Should Help You Avoid Offending Anyone!



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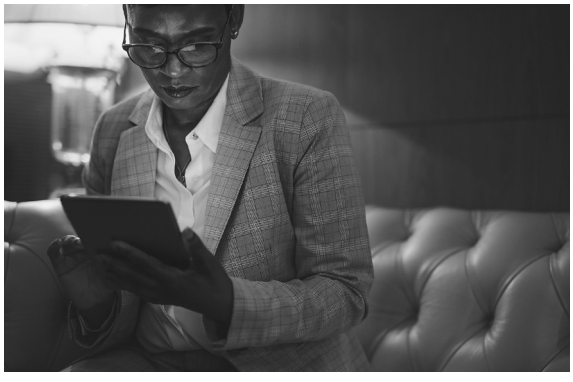
Many students believe that they communicate effectively, but in our experience most have room to improve. So, let's run through some guidelines (also, see the examples of good and bad emails in Figure 4.2).



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- Before reaching out, check the course syllabus to see if the professor has a preference for email or phone communication. If you try using a nonpreferred method, you might get a delayed response (or no response at all).
- Address the person with respect and use a proper title if appropriate (explained previously). For example, starting with "Professor Howard" is preferable to "Mrs. Howard," "Howard," or diving right into the message.
- Always include sufficient context so that the other person knows who you are. What is your name? Are you a student in the professor's class? If so, which class?
- Clearly state your question or problem. For example, we have received emails like this, "The form says that it needs a signature from a professional reference. thanks" but then there was nothing else. From that message, it was not clear what the student needed (e.g., "the form" is a very vague description; also it is not clear, but it seems as though the student is asking the professor to be a reference).
- If there is a problem, convey what you have already done to try and solve the problem on your own. Did you check the syllabus? Did you re-read the assignment instructions? Did you already contact the campus computer center for a technology issue?
- Be polite and use proper spelling and grammar—you are not texting a friend about shopping, video games, or going out.
- If possible, use a university or college email account instead of a personal account. The email address "JHernandez@smithcollege.edu" is much more professional than "princessjenna@gmail.com."
- People have lives outside of work (and this includes sleep). So, if you call or email outside of normal working hours, they may not respond until the next workday.
- Please remember that your professors are real-life human beings with feelings, just like you. So, do not berate them as if you are leaving a scathing online review.

Social Media

You may find that some of your professors are incorporating social media into their classes (e.g., Chamberlin, 2013). For example, some classes have shown that Twitter could be used to improve students' memory for class topics (Blessing, Blessing, & Fleck, 2012). That is great for those professors who choose to embrace social media. However, please understand that not all professors want to be social media "friends" with students (e.g., Kolowich, 2010)—so,

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FIGURE 4.2

Examples of Bad and Good Emails From a Student to a Professor

BAD EMAIL:

FROM: gamerdude420@gmail.com

SUBJECT: your class

Hey Mr. Copeland, what assignments were due during the first week? Is it oakay if i turm them in late cuz i did not realize things were du that weak?

John

GOOD EMAIL:

FROM: john.nguyen@ungl.edu

SUBJECT: question about late assignment in PSY 101

Professor Copeland, my name is John Nguyen from your online PSY 101 (section 2) course this semester. I missed the deadline for the week 1 assignment — this was my fault as I did not carefully check the deadline. I understand that this might not be accepted for full credit (I saw the syllabus policy about deducted points for late work), but I would appreciate your feedback on this assignment so that I will be prepared for the upcoming chapters. Thank you in advance for any feedback you are willing to provide.

John Nguyen

****

do not engage your professors on social media unless they explicitly invite you (e.g., Crowder, 2016). And please use good judgment when interacting with professors (or anyone) online!

Take-Home Message

One key message to take away from this module is this—no matter how you are interacting with professors, always be polite and professional! If they have not explicitly told you how they prefer to be addressed, always err on the side of formality. When you write an email, be clear about who you are and why you are emailing (and do not forget to proofread). It might seem like we are spending too much time on a trivial issue, but effective professional communication skills will benefit your future. So, do not limit what you learn here to communicating with professors—be professional in all of your educational and career communications.

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Action Steps

1. When you email an instructor, keep in mind that you are writing a professional message to your professor, not a text message to a friend. In addition, remember that professors interact with many students, so please be specific when you send a message.

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2. Although we tried to cover the important points on this topic, we could not cover everything in this short module. So, if you want to learn more about communicating with professors, we highly encourage you to check out Bremen's (2012) book titled *Say This, Not That to Your Professor: 36 Talking Tips for College Success*.

4.6 MEETING OTHERS AT YOUR INSTITUTION

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At this point, you probably have a good idea of why (and how) you should meet your professors. But, we think you should do more—for example, you can benefit a lot from meeting others in your department (e.g., Newport, 2005). We recommend that you meet (a) the department office staff, (b) other students in your major, and (c) graduate students (if your department has a graduate program). In addition, we think that it is very important for you to regularly meet with an academic advisor. Let's go through these, one by one, so that we can explain why it is important for you to meet each group.

Meet the Department Office Staff

Ask people who actually runs a department, and most will point to the office administrative assistants (e.g., Kim, 2014; Lapowsky, 2014). Most professors are experts in their areas of expertise, but they can be clueless about how the school and the department operate. Thus, the office staff can help you with all sorts of issues. For example, they know (a) what courses are being offered and when, (b) what courses are in the catalog but are never offered, (c) how to contact student organizations, (d) how to find certain professors, (e) when guest lectures are scheduled, and (f) possibly how to get onto a waiting list when a course is full. So, the next time you find yourself walking past the department office, stop by and say hi—you might want to have a good relationship with the office staff if and when you need help!

Meet Other Psychology Students

When we say that you should meet other students, we do not mean that you should try to meet every single psychology major—after all, some schools have over a thousand psychology majors! But, you should start by meeting students sitting nearby in your classes—just introduce yourself as you are waiting for class to start. You never know if you will find someone who might become your new best friend, a study partner, or someone who might know about unique opportunities (e.g., how to get onto a research team or information about an internship). Sometimes your classmates have already taken a class from your professor, so they might provide tips.

You should also seek out students with similar goals and interests as you. For example, if you want to find students who are interested in graduate school, then attend Psi Chi or Psychology Club meetings—these groups tend to have a lot of graduate-school-bound students. Go and chat with other students, especially the club officers (they typically wear club t-shirts or are the ones running the meetings). Do not be intimidated to talk to other students—if you are both attending the meeting, then you already have something in common!

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Meet Graduate Students

If your institution has a graduate program, then you should get to know the graduate students (e.g., Hart, 2002; Wlotko, 2002). You can find them in research settings, teaching courses (usually PSY 101), attending talks hosted by the department, or at any events that offer free food (graduate students are known for having low-paying stipends and student loans). You may even find some who participate in student clubs like Psi Chi (sometimes in a mentor role).

Graduate students are a great resource because, in most cases, they were recently just like you—trying to figure out how to succeed as an undergraduate psychology major. Most are willing to answer your questions, and they can provide tips about what they did well and maybe what they wished they had done. Also, graduate students are typically younger than professors, so you might not be as intimidated by them. In addition, getting to know a graduate student might be a way to get involved with a research team.

Meet with an Academic Advisor

College advisors are an invaluable resource to students (see Table 4.7)—they (should) know the curriculum and graduation requirements inside and out, and they can guide you through your major (and, if applicable, your second major or minor as well). One advising blog describes a college advisor as someone who is your "college amusement park fast-pass" (Gibson, 2017). We love this description because advisors can show you the most efficient way through the curriculum requirements so that you do not get stuck making slow progress like those students who skip their advising appointments (or those waiting 4 hours for one ride at Disney World).

How else can advisors help? Advisors can help in other ways, too. Some advisors might even point you toward the professors with the best teaching reputations. Advisors should also know the courses that are the most challenging, so they can make sure that you do not accidentally schedule Statistics, Organic Chemistry, Calculus, Latin, and Thermodynamics all together in the same semester. Advisors are well versed in how to get added to a wait list, how to drop a course (if you find yourself in over your head), and how to submit a petition so that you can skip a class you do not need (e.g., you might skip a history requirement if you scored well on an Advanced Placement History exam). Advisors can also tell you things such as whether you can earn credit for working on research.

College advisors might also have a good idea of what the superstar students are doing outside of class. Seriously, we highly recommend that you ask your advisor for tips about what you can do on campus in addition to your classes! If you are considering a study-abroad program, advisors can help you fit that into your plan. Some advisors can also answer your questions about career possibilities, career planning, and preparing for graduate school. Even if they do not have an answer to your specific question, they can point you toward resources or other places on campus where you can find help.

If you find yourself struggling in college, advisors can talk with you about your difficulties and explore your options. Can you benefit from tutoring? Advisors can point you in the right direction. Should you consider switching majors? Advisors can help you figure out how the courses you have already completed will fit with new potential majors. Are you behind in your graduation timeline because of a failed or dropped course? Advisors can help you find summer courses so that you can get back on track. Do you have family issues and need to step away from college for a semester? Advisors can work with you to figure out the right course of action.

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TABLE 4.7

Top Reasons to Meet Regularly With an Academic Advisor

- Stay on track to graduate
- Choose the best instructors
- Plan courses and schedules
- Manage a minor or double-major
- Adding, dropping, or bypassing courses
- Learn about resources at your institution (e.g., tutoring)
- Discover opportunities in your major (e.g., research)
- Discuss career or graduate school plans

How often to visit advisors? You should meet with your advisor(s) regularly, at least once a year, if not once a semester. The reason for this is that there are a lot of requirements and you want to make sure that you are on the right path to graduation. And, if you want to get the most out of your visit with an advisor, please spend a little bit of time to prepare beforehand. What we mean by this is that you should review your course history, explore the course options for the upcoming semester, and jot down any questions that you want to ask. If you take these steps before you arrive, you will be prepared to discuss the topics and options that are most important for you.

Take-Home Message

As we noted in an earlier module, there are a lot of benefits to meeting your professors. However, do not limit yourself to just meeting the faculty—meet your department's office staff, your fellow students who share your interests and goals, and graduate students (if your department has a graduate program). And please do not forget about the importance of meeting with an academic advisor regularly—their job is to help you navigate your way through college, so take advantage of this assistance. Each of these groups can provide you with helpful information and possibly connect you to opportunities and resources.

Action Steps

1. The next day you are on campus—whether it is today, tomorrow, or next week—stop by the department or college office and say hello to the office staff. If you have a question that they might be able to answer, then ask. If you cannot come up with a question, then ask if they can point you to any resources for psychology-related careers, graduate school, or about any student clubs related to psychology.
2. If you do not have an advising appointment for this semester, make one now. Seriously—call, email, or stop by to make an appointment today. To make your advising appointments more productive, take stock of where you have been (e.g., your transcript) and what you want to do (e.g., majors/minors, career goals) and jot down any questions about your college journey; do not worry about asking a dumb question—the only dumb questions are the ones you do not ask.

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