# Explore the Wide Range of Psychological Science Careers

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

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# Choosing a Satisfying Career

What comes next? What type of work do I really want to do, and where do I want to do it?

Many graduate students have been exposed to an adage regarding the selection of one's first job: "Type of job, location, salary: pick one and compromise on the other two." Interestingly, this adage does not acknowledge happiness, balance, fulfillment, or a sense of purpose in one's career, yet those may ultimately be the factors that more strongly lead to job performance, longevity, and life satisfaction.

Psychological scientists have unique training and subsequently many skills that are valued in a wide range of positions. This is important because psychological scientists are needed everywhere, not just in academia. Most critical societal issues and grand challenges for our culture involve human behavior, and psychological scientists' expertise is an extremely valuable asset needed across a wide range of diverse job opportunities.

This guide was written to help psychological scientists consider the many different possible careers that draw upon doctoral training and skills. If you are wondering "What comes next? What type of work do I really want to do, and where do I want to do it?" then you are not alone. Choosing a career for satisfaction and success can lead you down a path to a more meaningful work life that matches your interests and meets your needs, values, desired lifestyle, and goals.

A good place to start may be our own psychological science. The science of vocational psychology has identified the factors that lead to job satisfaction, fulfillment, and happiness. Vocational psychologists help people find supportive occupational environments in which they can experience meaning and purpose in their work. Brief descriptions of major theoretical advances and practical applications related to career decision making and choosing a satisfying career are offered in this review. In short, to find a meaningful and fulfilling career you will want to consider a range of factors, including occupational and institutional climates; diverse; supportive; and equitable environments; demands on your time, the impacts of your work, and the ways you will be rewarded and evaluated. Based on leading models of the predictors of job satisfaction, you may want to consider the questions on page 3.

## Self-Assessment for a Satisfying Career Path

1. *What interests you most? What are you doing when you lose track of time?*
2. *What energizes you and gives you joy?*
3. *What do you see as your greatest strengths? Biggest learning and growth opportunities?*
4. *What are you doing when you feel most confident? Least confident?*
5. *What do you value most? How would the careers you are considering align with those values?*
6. *What are your greatest needs (e.g., social connection, power, flexibility, influence, achievement, recognition, purpose, balance, making a difference)? How would you best fulfill those needs in a career?*
7. *What kind of work would give you a sense of purpose and be personally and socially fulfilling?*
8. *What do you find intrinsically motivating and what are some extrinsically motivating factors for you?*
9. *What goals and rewards do you seek in a career (e.g., personal achievements and/or collaborative wins)?*
10. *What kind of impact do you want to have in your career?*
11. *What environments bring out your best?*
12. *Do you gravitate toward environments supporting autonomy or a more structured work environment? How will know that you found the environment you are looking for?*
13. *What kind, and how much interaction with others are you seeking in your career? Do you prefer to work autonomously or in groups and teams? Do you prefer one-on-one interaction or teamwork?*
14. *What do you need in a workplace to feel welcomed, supported, and growth-oriented?*
15. *What do you need to achieve work-life balance?*
16. *What excites you the most and worries you as you consider making a career decision?*
17. *How do you make important life decisions? What helps and what gets in the way?*
18. *What role do relationships play in your career decision making process? What role would you like them to play?*
19. *What is standing in the way of deciding on a career path? What barriers do you anticipate encountering and how will you handle them?*
20. *Which career paths have you ruled out or overlooked and why? What assumptions do you hold about your ability to be successful and satisfied in these careers? What evidence supports those assumptions?*

*Click here to access an interactive version of the assessement.*

After you have taken a moment to consider each of these questions, proceed to the following Career Paths in Psychological Science section to see how your own interests and preferences may align with one or more of the most common types of jobs for psychological scientists. Although many of the factors discussed in the Career Paths in Psychological Science section depend greatly on the specific company, institution, or agency you choose to work within, this section offers some general information on how different types of jobs may vary in responsibilities, expectations, and roles. ■

If you are looking for a more structured plan for your career exploration journey, you can use the APA Individual Development Plan to guide you through five steps that will set you up for success.

# Career Paths in Psychological Science

Psychological scientists can improve many workplaces and help many industries flourish.

This section of the guide is designed to offer a brief overview of the most common types of positions available to recent graduates with a doctorate in psychology, focusing specifically on careers that will call upon your training as a psychological scientist. We begin with the one you probably know the most about – the roles at a doctoral-granting institution. We then cover other types of jobs that are very popular among psychological scientists, but many have less exposure to.

As you review each section, as well as the summary chart Characteristics of Common Jobs for Psychological Scientists available with this guide, it will be evident that your knowledge and expertise in the science of psychology can be used to benefit society in many ways, including a variety of positions within and outside of academia. None of these options are better or more prestigious than another. Rather, each offers a distinct way to use your talents, meet your work preferences, and satisfy your professional needs to help you not only find employment, but also feel personally fulfilled and inspired by what you do and the job path you decide to take. Psychological scientists can improve many workplaces and help many industries flourish. You can make extraordinary and critically important contributions to the world in any of the positions described in the following sections and are more likely to do so if you are happy while doing it.

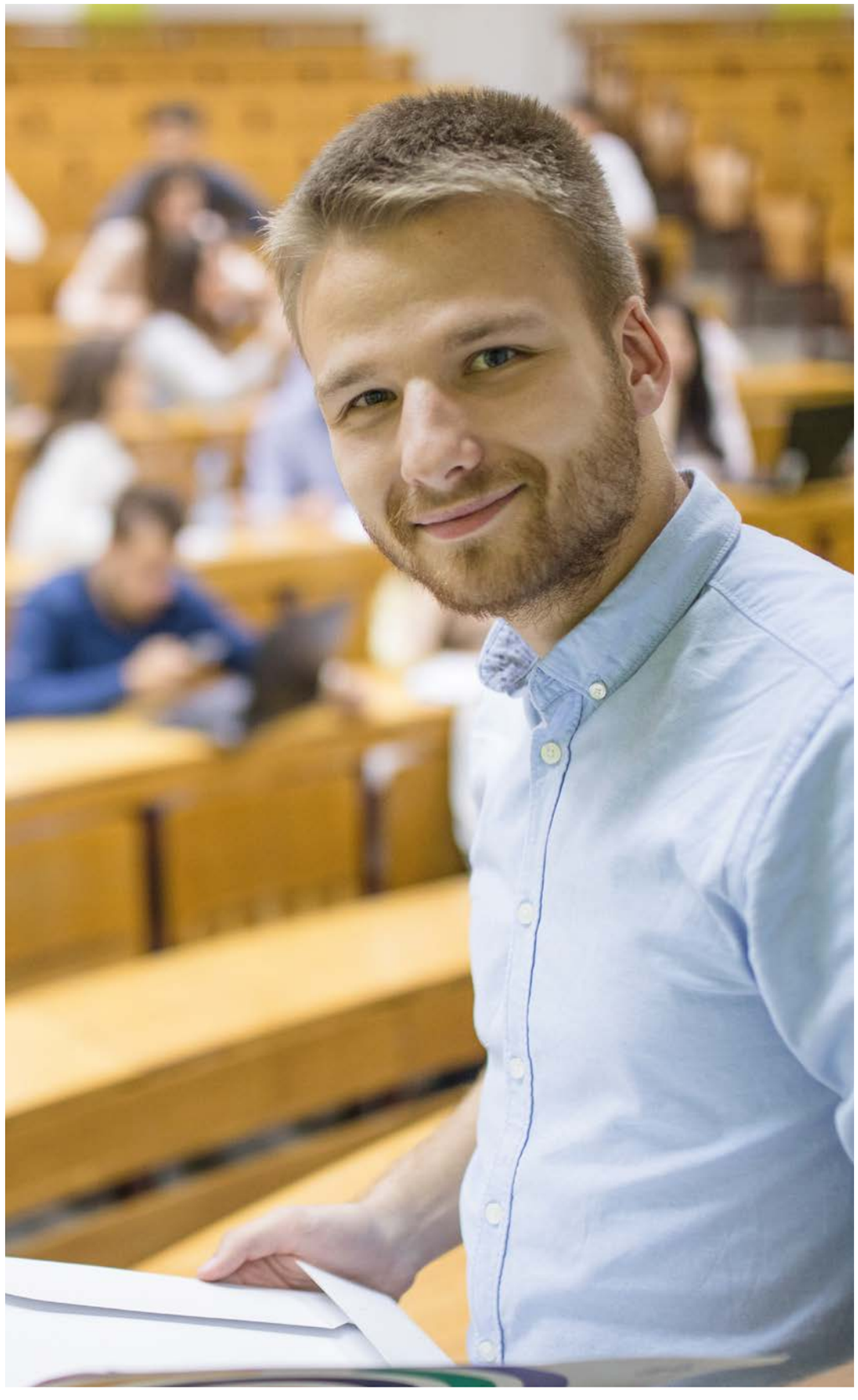
But before beginning to describe these positions, a few caveats should be mentioned. First, there are far more job possibilities and potential employment settings than those described in this guide. To make this guide manageable, we have restricted our discussion to some of the most popular options psychological scientists have elected to pursue to date. For additional examples of outstanding job possibilities to pursue with your doctoral degree, please review APA's webinar series "How did you get that job?", "Careers in applied psychology", and series on jobs in AI and public sector, positive psychology, etc.

Second, to help compare and contrast these positions to one another, we have added information drawn from publicly available sources and expert experience accessed in spring 2024 to illustrate possible salary ranges, publication requirements, and so forth. Note that these are estimates that change rapidly over time,

and the differences among places of employment also vary substantially. Please use this information to compare different types of positions rather than as documented minimum or maximum values as part of your research into career pathways. Updated data are available at the Bureau of Labor, or the O*NET Online.

Third, a quick word about imposter syndrome: graduate school is focused on your training experiences and often emphasizes what you still need to learn rather than what you already know. But take a moment to consider all the expertise you have accrued in the process of your graduate career thus far. Most psychological scientists have learned how to think scientifically about theoretical and empirical questions, how to develop and test hypotheses using rigorous methods, how to analyze and interpret data, and how to evaluate others' research, including its strengths and limitations. You may have had experience leading or mentoring a research team to help conduct your work, and you may have learned how to prepare, submit, and revise reports for publication; how to present one's research to an audience with a range of expertise; or perhaps how to write a grant proposal. You have expertise in considering research ethically and how to submit requests for ethical review of research. You may even have some training in how to apply or review applications to join a team, conduct interviews, and evaluate progress among team members. As a graduate student in psychology, you might take these skills for granted, since they are all part of what we call "doing research." But, in the world outside of graduate school, these can be remarkably valuable skills that people get paid for in a wide range of settings (see also: The Skillful Psychology Student). You may be surprised to know just how few professionals have the scientific training that you have had, and this makes you exceptionally marketable to a wide range of possible careers.

In the "Characteristics of Common Jobs for Psychological Scientists" that follows each section, you will find a brief description of the primary job responsibilities, salaries, task expectations, work environments, and aspects of performance evaluations for a range of work settings. These descriptions are meant to supplement the chart that is included within this guide so you may make comparisons on the factors that may prove most relevant for you. We recommend that you use this information to find a fit between the types of activities and work outcomes that will make you feel most fulfilled. ■



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# Academia

As a doctoral student immersed in an academic setting, you likely already have a general sense of faculty positions at doctoral institutions. However, there are many possible academic settings and roles beyond doctoral universities, and also many aspects to academic positions that are less visible. Below we discuss how the work environment, job expectations, and evaluation of faculty roles vary across doctoral universities, master's colleges and universities, and baccalaureate (i.e., liberal arts undergraduate) or community colleges. These differences certainly do not imply that one set of responsibilities is harder or easier than another; faculty simply dedicate their time in different ways, and it is important to consider how these differences align with your preferences.

Most faculty tend to have some flexibility in setting their work goals and areas of focus. In other words, they are their own "bosses," and to some extent can decide what to work on, when to work on it, how much to take on. Of course, faculty are nevertheless evaluated, both for tenure and promotion, and often even annually to ensure that they have met at least minimal thresholds for research, teaching, and service. This is particularly relevant for those who are not in a tenure-track or "ladder rank" position, as these evaluations often are used to determine whether faculty will be hired for a new three- or five-year contract. Many of these non-tenure track positions are for teaching professors, for research professors who are working on a contract or grant, or even for administrative roles (e.g., associate director of a graduate program or clinic). Research professor positions are most similar to research Institute positions described below; teaching professor positions are most similar to positions in liberal arts colleges discussed below.

The following section will offer an overview of faculty jobs across different types of institutions. Note that there are substantial differences between every department and every university and college; this guide is meant to offer some general characteristics and broad estimates to help compare and contrast across different types of positions. Note also that in the U.S., each of these types of universities and colleges may be found at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) or at minority-serving institutions, including Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal colleges, and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) that offer an opportunity to focus predominantly on specific underserved groups.

### Doctoral Universities

Doctoral universities are institutions that award at least 20 research/scholarly doctorates. The level of research activity varies in these universities. At most doctoral universities, student tuition makes up a small percentage of revenue streams while grants, contracts, and research generate larger percentages. As such, faculty jobs have a commensurate emphasis on producing research and publishing work in prestigious journals and other outlets, getting grants, and engaging in activities that bring the university prestige and notoriety as a leading scientific institution. Succeeding in the research domain takes a substantial amount of time and involves several tasks that might not be immediately visible. Gaining appropriate research approvals and certifications, recruiting participants, managing lab budgets, supervising lab teams, troubleshooting ongoing issues with data collection and analysis, revising papers or grant applications, communicating, translating research for media and the public, and several other related tasks can be very time consuming, yet may not be visible on one's CV as tangible accomplishments that count toward promotion and tenure. Many faculty at a doctoral-granting institution might spend between 50-95% of their time managing research-related tasks, including the time spent in writing and reviewing manuscripts.

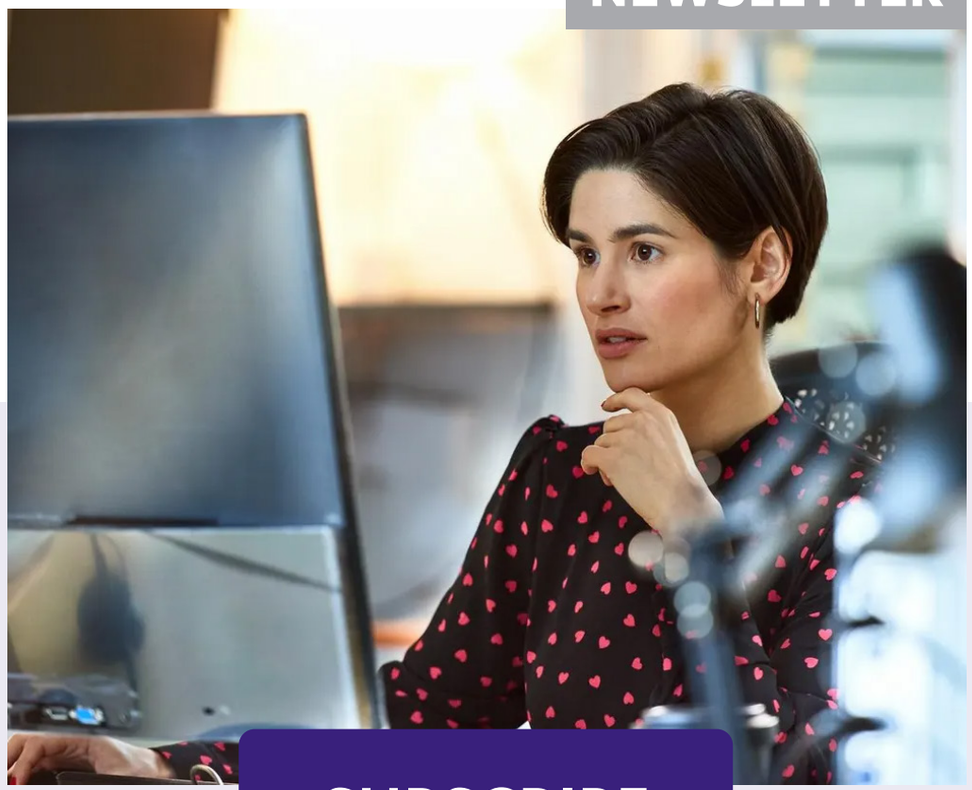
Although the emphasis is on conducting and producing research, faculty at doctoral-granting institutions also have teaching and service responsibilities. New faculty members might find that that it takes significant time to develop course materials and lesson plans in the first couple of years but less time after more experience. Service responsibilities often involve department and university committee work that helps the department or university function well (e.g., Institutional Review Boards (IRBs), search committees, promotion and tenure committees), assisting and advising students (meeting with students interested in your research or discipline) or being a good departmental citizen (e.g., attending talks and presentations). You might spend anywhere from one to five hours a week on service activities, and if you obtain a leadership position, this number can increase considerably. In general, advancement and performance evaluations are often based on a combination of your success in research (i.e., often measured by the number of publications, the quality of the outlets where those publications are accepted, and successfully securing grant funding, together accounting for 40-60% of one's job performance evaluation), as well as teaching (as measured by teaching evaluations and a review of your course syllabi, and your graduate students' success with research, together accounting for 10-30% of performance evaluation), and service (accounting for 5-20% of performance evaluation).

### Baccalaureate and Liberal Arts Colleges

Baccalaureate Colleges are institutions where the majority of students are undergraduates. Liberal Arts Colleges include some Baccalaureate Colleges and focus on the undergraduate broad study in liberal arts and general sciences. At these institutions, revenue is usually generated through tuition with comparatively little from research grants, though this differs significantly depending upon the academic reputation

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of the institution. The job priorities for faculty at baccalaureate colleges thus tend to emphasize teaching undergraduate students, with less emphasis on developing a large independent research program. As opposed to teaching two to four courses a year at doctoral granting institutions, for instance, faculty at most liberal arts colleges may teach two to four courses each semester (this guide references semesters but some institutions operate on trimester or quarter systems), which may amount to four to eight courses a year. Psychology departments are relatively small, so there is a great opportunity to represent an entire subdomain of the discipline (i.e., there is typically only one cognitive psychologist, one developmental psychologist, and so forth) and little competition for courses you may wish to teach. Faculty also dedicate significant time to university service activities such as attending faculty meetings, faculty governance committee work managing administrative tasks, advising students, and other related responsibilities.

Because there are few graduate students in liberal arts colleges, there are fewer teaching assistants assigned to courses. Faculty, sometimes with the help of advanced undergraduate teaching assistants, are therefore responsible for all aspects of course design, instruction, grading, and other related tasks. Often, faculty also have the responsibility to help students develop thesis and capstone projects and to meet with students during office hours for advising matters. Demonstrating innovative teaching methods and pedagogical approaches is highly valued; tenure portfolios may include observations of your teaching, and review committees often request input from undergraduate students. Faculty are expected to be aware of the latest advances in pedagogical research and to employ innovative teaching techniques that optimize student learning and student success.

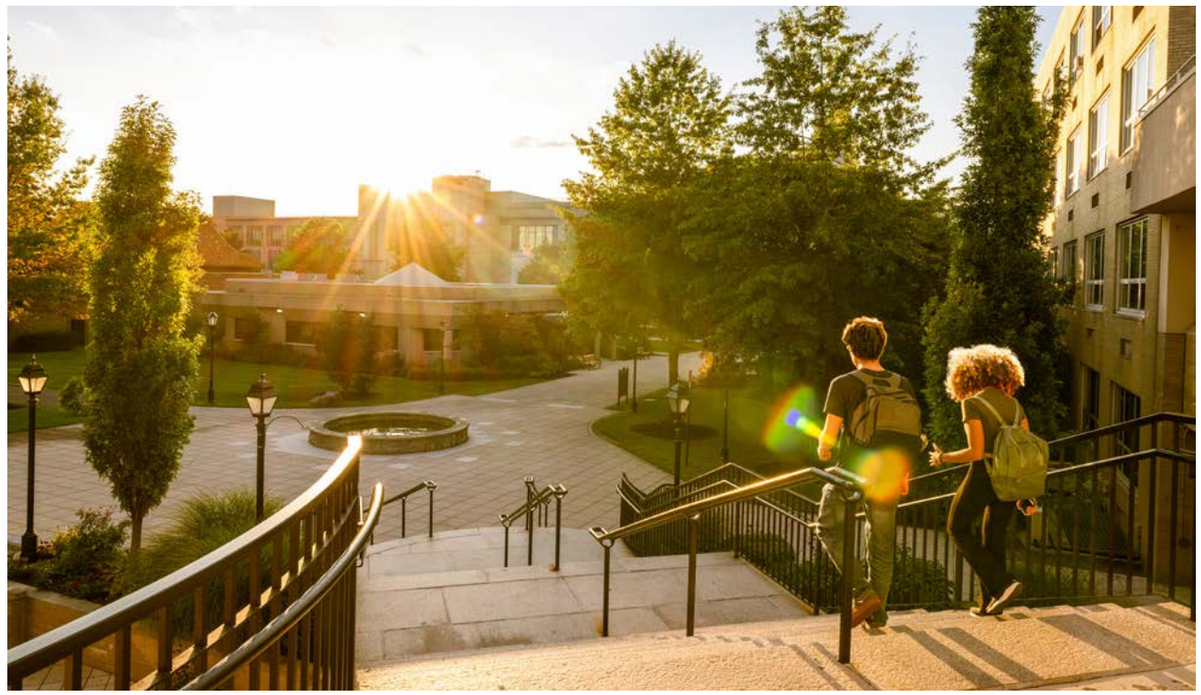
Faculty at liberal arts colleges are expected to engage in research. However, the expectations for research productivity vary significantly. Publication counts, types of publications, and grant applications may be less emphasized within liberal arts colleges as compared to doctoral-granting institutions. Faculty may conduct research with undergraduate students who are completing a senior thesis, and opportunities to present research at a national conference, for some, may be sufficient indicators of research progress. Faculty also may conduct research that is specific to undergraduate populations and activities. For instance, the National Science Foundation has a Division of Undergraduate Education and provides funding aimed at strengthening and diversifying STEM education (including psychology) at two- and four-year colleges.

### Community (Junior) Colleges

Another option for those who want to focus on teaching and mentoring students, especially underserved students, is to teach at a community college. Community colleges (called junior colleges in some states) focus on associate degrees, certificates that prepare students for immediate employment, and transfer programs. Many students from minoritized backgrounds begin their educational careers at a community college. Teaching at a community college usually means reaching five classes per semester, but class enrollments are much smaller than at larger institutions. Community colleges offer courses in many delivery formats including traditional schedules, online (synchronous and asynchronous), weekends, Sunday mornings, four-week and many other design iterations. Some have satellite campuses so you may teach at a variety of sites in the county. The goal is to serve the students in the community, so course schedules reflect the need to be available. Community colleges offer flexibility and may offer a better life-work balance. Faculty are expected to advise students and serve on committees but there are usually no requirements for publication. Research is welcome but there are no labs and no assistants and usually there is no release time for such endeavors. Many community colleges, however, create programs to involve students in research and presentations. However, the primary job focus is teaching and mentoring.

### Master's Colleges and Universities

Master's colleges and universities are institutions that award at least 50 master's degrees and fewer than 20 doctoral degrees. We present information on master's colleges last because in many ways, these positions offer a mix of many of the features listed above. Faculty at master's colleges and universities are expected to contribute to both research and teaching, but with an understanding that contributions are more balanced between these two activities than at doctoral-granting or liberal arts/community colleges. In other words, there is less of a research emphasis than at doctoral institutions (i.e., fewer publications or grants expected) and less emphasis on teaching (i.e., fewer courses per semester) than at baccalaureate colleges, but faculty are expected to succeed in both activities, as well as departmental and university service.



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### Academic Centers and Research Institutes

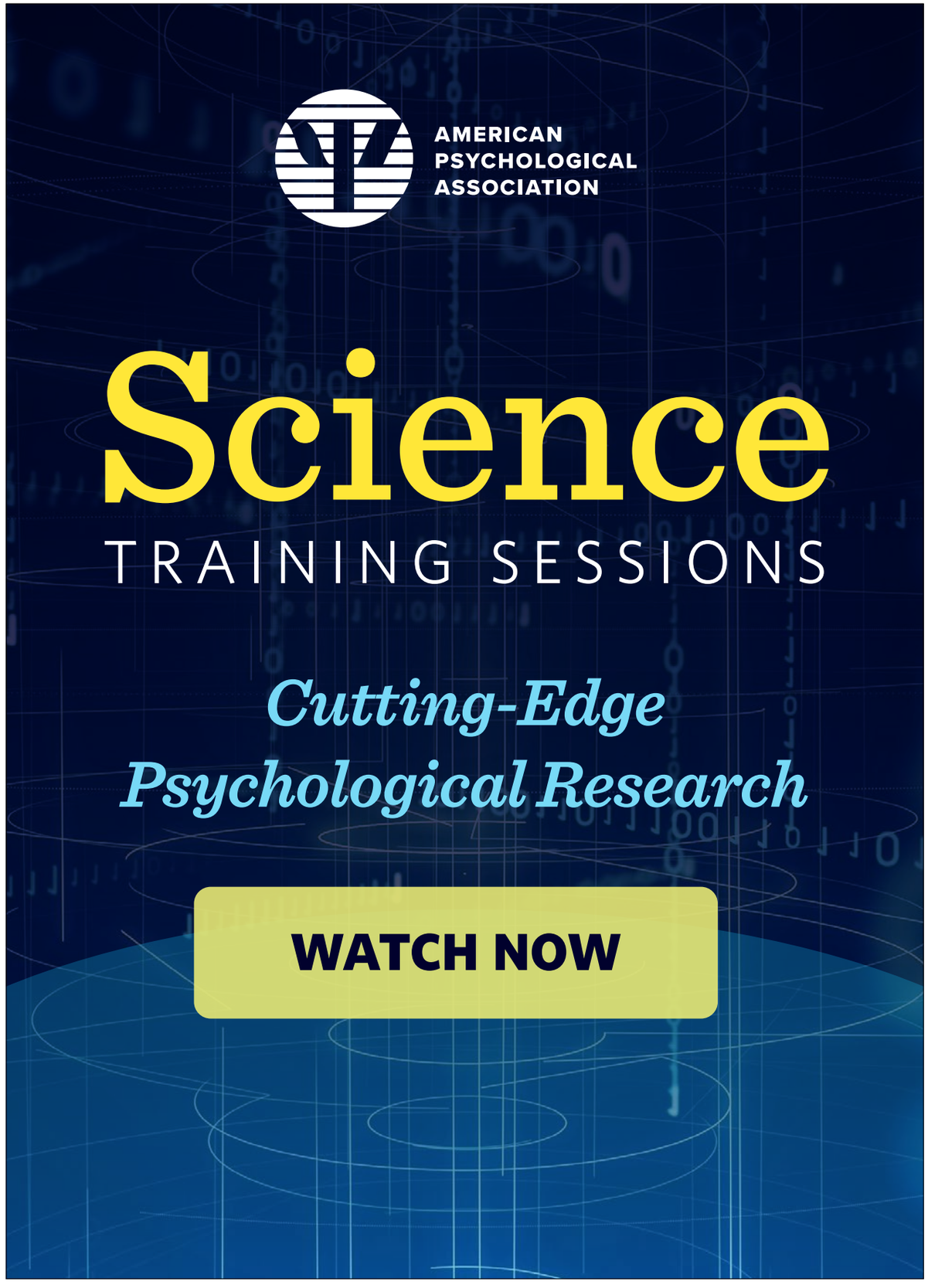
Although many may think of psychology departments, often located within a college of arts and sciences, or the college of education as a natural home for psychological scientists in the academic sector, many psychological scientists work throughout different university schools and departments. For instance, there are many psychological scientists who work within academic centers that could be research institutes not fully housed within a department, affiliated with other parts of the university (e.g., medical school (psychiatry), school of public health, business, education, or social work), or free-standing centers not connected to a university at all. Roles in these settings may emphasize research heavily. Depending on the position, there may be opportunities to teach graduate students (e.g., students in an education or public health program, or medical residents). Within a medical school setting, licensed health service psychologists may also be expected to provide care to patients.

While faculty in departments of psychology tend to write for journal publications, researchers in academic medical centers and research centers tend to spend more time writing grants to support their salary and research team. Additionally, writing tends to be more interdisciplinary and collaborative in these roles as there is often a team working on a grant insteadof one faculty member in the psychology department focused on a topic.

Jobs in academic medical centers and research centers might be funded through “hard” (i.e., permanent or semi-permanent institutional funds) versus “soft” revenue funding streams. Soft funding can often include self-generated funding through grants, patient care, or other fundraising efforts. Many faculty members at academic medical centers and research institutes may have a portion of hard and soft money sources in their salary. For example, if a position is funded 75% in hard money, you are expected to raise 25% of your own salary through soft money. Sometimes, positions are exclusively supported by one of the two types of funding.

Grant writing is competitive, and success may vary based on the federal/state government budget and/or on the availability of funding from foundations and other private sources. As the national economy fluctuates, the availability of grant funds also may change. If you do not have grant funding during harsh economic times, your job description might change. You might be expected to take on more patient care, teaching roles, or other kinds of service responsibilities if you are unable to maintain grant funding and the department is unable to offer temporary funding until your next successful grant application.

While there can be opportunities to earn tenure in academic medical centers and research centers, it is different from earning tenure as a faculty member in an academic department as job stability still requires you to raise enough money to support your position. Positions in academic medical centers and research centers tend to be more popular when the economy is strong and can quickly become more challenging if the economy shifts and grant opportunities become limited. ■



# Characteristics of Common Jobs for Psychological Scientists

| Setting | Typical Job Responsibilities | Salary & Resources | Writing Expectations | Work Environment | Advancement & Performance Evaluation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Doctoral Universities** | • Conduct research<br>• Publish/present findings<br>• Train students to do the same<br>• Secure research grants<br>• Teach one to two classes per semester (this guide references semesters but some institutions operate on trimester or quarter systems)<br>• Teaching load may include both undergraduate and graduate level courses<br>• Supervise undergraduate and/or graduate teaching/research assistant(s)<br>• Engage in university service responsibilities (i.e., committee work, administrative duties, participation in campus events, etc.) | • Salaries vary by rank, institutional type (private/public), and location<br><br>Average salary range for a nine-month contract for new Assistant Professor in 2017-2018 ranged from $42,317 to $99,075 (Median: $63,375). This median is equivalent to a 9-month salary of $81,510 (Bureau of Labor Statistics) in 2024 (For updated information, see the Bureau of Labor or the O*NET Online)<br>• A wide range of research lab start-up funds ($10K–$350K) and infrastructure is typically available<br>• Teaching buyouts and professional travel are possible from grant funds or start-up costs at some institutions<br>• Summer teaching or grant-funded research activity may yield summer salary support | • At least two to four publications per year. Publication quality/impact is important<br>• Research grants; apply for and successfully be awarded at least one grant (timeline will vary by institution) | • Work setting is typically on campus, with some flexibility on how often one is in person<br>• A nine-month position typically requires less work (i.e., teaching) during the summer, although many faculty remain active with research during summer months<br>• Flexibility to pursue one's own research interests<br>• Deep research expertise is valued and expected<br>• Multidisciplinary and cross-field research collaboration can be challenging | • Tenure decisions typically include evidence of impact of research innovation and accomplishments, separate from mentor and/or senior author, and emerging research leadership<br>• Colleagues external to the institution and familiar with the candidate's work are asked to write letters of support during the tenure review process<br>• Institutional service and teaching are also considered for tenure, but not to the same degree as research accomplishments |

| Setting | Typical Job Responsibilities | Salary & Resources | Writing Expectations | Work Environment | Advancement & Performance Evaluation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Baccalaureate and Liberal Arts Colleges** | • Teach three to five undergraduate level classes per semester<br>• Maintain regular office hours to support students<br>• Conduct research involving undergraduate students and publish findings, with expectation differing across institutions<br>• Engage in campus service responsibilities (i.e., committee work, advising, administrative duties, participate in campus events, etc.) | • Nine-month salaries have traditionally been approximately 5-15% lower than for comparable rank at doctoral institutions<br>• Limited start-up funds are available<br>• Teaching buyouts, summer salary, and professional travel are possible from grant funds but limited | • Co-authorship on publications and posters; few first-authored publications are expected, although this varies greatly across different colleges and universities | • Typically, a nine-month position requires less work during the summer<br>• Some flexibility to pursue one's own research interests but time spent teaching might be a constraint<br>• Broad research expertise across an entire sub-discipline of psychology is valued<br>• Multidisciplinary and cross-field research collaboration can be challenging | • Tenure decisions often include demonstrated high-quality teaching, pedagogical innovation, and university service<br>• Undergraduate students are often involved in the tenure decision-making process, typically through letters of recommendation reviewed by faculty and administrators making the recommendations<br>• If appropriate, colleagues external to the institution and familiar with the candidate's work are asked to write letters of support during the tenure review process |
| **Master's Colleges and Universities** | • Conduct research involving undergraduate and master's students, and publish findings<br>• Teach two to four classes per semester<br>• Engage in university service responsibilities (i.e., committee work, advising, administrative duties, participate in campus events, etc.). | • Nine-month salaries have traditionally been approximately 0-10% lower than for comparable rank at doctoral institutions<br>• Research lab start-up funds and infrastructure is typically available<br>• Teaching buyouts, summer salary, and professional travel are possible from grant funds | • Co-authorship on publications and posters; fewer first-authored publications are expected than at doctoral institutions<br>• Undergraduate and master's students are expected to co-author publications<br>• Potential to write research grants | • Work setting is typically in-person, with some flexibility on how often one is on campus that varies from institution to institution<br>• A nine-month position requires less work during the summer<br>• Flexibility to pursue one's own research interests<br>• Deep research expertise is valued | • Tenure decisions are often based upon teaching evaluations and research innovations/ accomplishments<br>• Institutions vary in publication expectations<br>• Undergraduate students are often involved in the tenure decision-making process, typically through letters of recommendation reviewed by faculty and administrators making the recommendations<br>• If appropriate, colleagues external to the institution and familiar with the candidate's work are asked to write letters of support during the tenure review process |

| Setting | Typical Job Responsibilities | Salary & Resources | Writing Expectations | Work Environment | Advancement & Performance Evaluation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Community Colleges (Junior Colleges)** | • Teach five classes per semester<br>• Engage in campus service responsibilities (i.e., committee work, advising, administrative duties, participate in campus events, etc.) | • CC salaries vary greatly depending on funding source and geography<br>• Many institutions consider adjunct teaching to determine rank and level<br>• Salary caps are generally lower than doctoral-level institutions<br>• Research is welcome but there are no labs or assistants and typically there is no time release for research activities | • Most institutions do not require publication or grant applications<br>• Faculty are welcome to engage in writing activities, but activities focused on teaching will carry more weight in evaluations | • Most contracts are nine months although summer teaching is available, often at adjunct pay scale<br>• Requirements for being on campus vary based on teaching and committee work<br>• Course delivery can include several formats such as traditional schedules, online (synchronous and asynchronous), weekends, Sunday mornings, four-week and many other design iterations<br>• Office hours are required but some institutions allow those to be virtual | • Some institutions still have tenure with traditional ranks although many just offer multi-year contracts<br>• Observation by Dean or Chair is common for evaluation<br>• Criteria vary widely but teaching (including student evaluations) is the primary focus along with departmental or college service<br>• Some professional development (related to teaching) may be a factor |
| **Academic Center; Research Institutes** | • Conduct research<br>• Secure funding to support own salary, staff salaries, research expenses, program costs, and all related infrastructure needs<br>• Oversee administrative tasks related to leading projects, budget management, and infrastructure<br>• Collaborate with community partners, research stakeholders, etc.<br>• See patients in clinical practice, if applicable | • Often paid as a 12-month salary at rates comparable to 12-month equivalent salaries at doctoral institutions | • Emphasis on research grants and contract applications to ensure ongoing funding for you and your staff<br>• Write scholarly publications and presentations | • Work setting is typically in-person, with flexibility on how often one is on campus that varies from institution to institution<br>• Some flexibility to structure time and work based on personal task prioritization<br>• Flexibility to engage in action and dissemination at a stakeholder level<br>• Ability to generalize research skills across fields, topics, and areas of inquiry is valued | • Soft money portion of employment may be dependent upon ongoing self-funding |



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# Business & Industry

Business and industry perhaps present psychological scientists with the broadest array of employment opportunities. While in graduate school, we may tend to spend most of our time around academic colleagues, and it may begin to seem as if everyone works in academia. However, only about 4 million people in the U.S. work in higher education, and that includes all faculty, staff, and administration of any type (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). In contrast, well over 130 million people in the U.S. work in private sector jobs (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024) that may focus on a wide range of topics related to human behavior, such as technology and AI use, climate change, social justice, pharmaceuticals, law, marketing, human relations, and so on. Business and industry can roughly be broken into the categories of large businesses, small businesses, and professional service firms.

### Large Businesses

Large businesses may be national or international and are often organized as corporations. A corporation is a for-profit legal entity that is distinct from its owners. Many large corporations have shareholders and are publicly traded on the stock market, meaning that the corporation ultimately owes a duty to the shareholders to act, at least in part, in their best interests. Internally, corporations can be organized in different ways. However, they sometimes involve a hierarchical management structure with a board of directors, a CEO, and layers of managers and employees who all ultimately report to the CEO.

Large businesses frequently need employees who possess the skill set of a psychological scientist. However, it may be unusual for a large business to specifically advertise a position for a "psychologist" or to have a "psychology unit." Instead, large businesses may be more likely to have a group of employees referred to as a "behavioral science unit," or a "people/statistical analytics unit." Those groups or units may employ scientists from a mix of various social science backgrounds, including psychology. However, these positions may be more likely to be in units including the words "research," "science," "data," or "analyst," without specifying psychology. In a large business setting, psychological scientists may be asked to use their skills in numerous ways. While the positions may draw upon a foundation of psychological science, the day-to-day activities may involve more team interaction than the solitary research or writing that is sometimes associated with scientific careers in academia.

In business, psychological scientists typically work within broader teams that may not include any other psychologists, but rather with people across many parts of the organization and with a variety of areas of expertise. Your scientific knowledge will be one part of many skill sets needed to complete a task or reach a team-based goal. Such work places a premium on the ability to work well with others, communicate with clarity and without discipline-specific jargon, and keep efforts moving forward toward a common, shared goal. Your writing expectations will be very different from those in an academic setting. You might write internally focused and/or externally focused reports and memos, or external communications such as consensus papers, reports, policy briefs, and op-eds for broad audiences.

These positions often involve being evaluated against performance goals that are tied to concrete, real-world outcomes, including business profitability. Such positions may present opportunities for promotion and advancement in the organization. Unlike academic positions, the pay for positions in large businesses can vary widely, and there is the potential, over time, to reach high levels of compensation.

### Small Businesses

The vast majority of businesses in the U.S. are considered small businesses. The precise definition of a "small business" can vary depending on the purpose for which it is being defined. Generally speaking, small businesses are for-profit organizations that are independently owned and operated, and that have fewer than 2,500 employees (though by some definitions the



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number of employees may be far less than 2,500, such as fewer than 250 employees or even fewer than 50 employees). Small businesses may be owned by individuals, families, groups of investors, or the employees themselves.

Small businesses sometimes follow a corporate structure similar to large corporations. However, some small businesses operate with a much less formal culture and maintain more of a "flat" organization with less hierarchy of management. Many people enjoy employment in small businesses because small businesses can have unique and supportive cultures where employees feel a common bond through their work toward a shared goal.

Because there are so many small businesses in the U.S. and because their work is so varied, there is no single, or even typical path, to employment in a small business. For example, some small software and technology companies employ psychological scientists to assist with user experience research and development. As another example, some small businesses employ psychological scientists to lead human resource departments. The pathway to employment in those two positions would likely be very different and, overall, the pathway to employment in small business is often a very individualized journey.

### Professional Service Firms

Professional service firms are for-profit organizations that provide services to clients, usually through formal contracts. Examples would include accounting firms, recruitment firms, law firms, public relations firms, marketing firms, communication firms, and research or management consulting firms. Professional service firms are often organized as partnerships or limited liability companies, as opposed to corporations. This means that the firms are privately owned, not traded on the stock market, and often are managed by the owners rather than by an external board of directors or by a CEO. One result of this is that the workplace culture within a profes-

sional service firm can be quite different than the workplace culture in a corporation. For example, some professional service firms have a "flatter" organizational structure in which there are a large number of professional peers, less direct supervision, and less hierarchy of management.

In the setting of a professional service firm, psychologists are employed to provide services to external clients or to provide support to the organization itself. In the latter, a psychologist might, for example, lead a EDI department or an HR department within the firm, with a focus on the employees of the firm itself. In the former situation, a psychologist might, for example, serve as a consultant to outside clients on specific projects that the client has retained the firm to complete. For example, psychologists who are employed as jury consultants, leadership consultants, or performance consultants will typically work for multiple clients who retain the firm's services. In some instances, such consultants travel frequently to client sites all across the country or even across the globe, enjoy a fast-paced and highly competitive work environment, and have autonomy over, and variety in, their duties.

Work intensity can vary depending upon the needs and demands of clients at a particular point in time and client funding cycles. Prioritizing and managing the needs of clients to both deliver high-quality work products/deliverables and stay within a contracted budget is paramount. Regular development and evaluation of performance goals is usually required, and the ability to generalize research skills across fields, topics, and areas of inquiry tends to be valued. Performance reviews occur regularly, usually at least once a year, and tend to evaluate concrete deliverables and goals achievement, including collaboration goals and contributions toward profitability. The ability to develop new business opportunities and engage new clients is also often a highly valued skill in this environment.

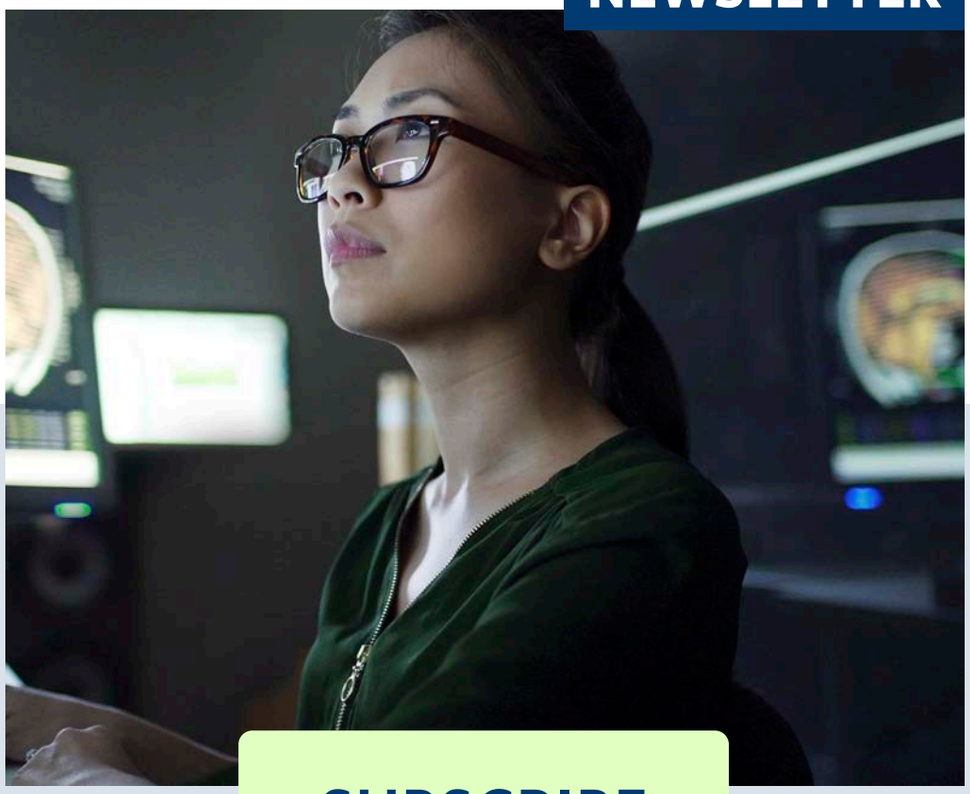
Although you might be able to write scholarly publications and presentations, depending on the industry, these may be more limited and will contribute less to your performance evaluations. However, it can be relatively common to write shorter pieces for publication in outlets that are likely to be read by clients and potential clients. The goal of such articles is often to establish yourself and your firm as a thought leader and to build a reputation that will attract future clients.

Professional service firms can vary in size from sole proprietorships to global consulting firms. Some psychologists gain their initial experience working at a large professional service firm and, later, after they have gained skills and deep professional relationships, will create their own business to provide consulting or other services.

Salaries in professional service firms can vary widely. Roughly speaking, most doctorate-level employees in a professional service firm may have incomes that would be considered "upper middle class." However, depending on the value of the services provided to clients and whether you move into firm management, there are fewer limits on compensation, and some working in these settings earn salaries in the "1 percent," meaning their compensation is in the 99th percentile of the U.S. population. ■


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# Characteristics of Common Jobs for Psychological Scientists

| Setting | Typical Job Responsibilities | Salary & Resources | Writing Expectations | Work Environment | Advancement & Performance Evaluation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Business and Industry | • Develop, direct, and manage projects<br>• Engage in business development activities<br>• Prepare and present business plans to internal and external stakeholders<br>• Foster and sustain collaborative partnerships with clients<br>• Advance clients' business interests<br>• Conduct research to inform the development and/or evaluation of projects, programs, policy, organizational decisions, etc.<br>• Apply existing research from the literature to inform the development and/or evaluation of projects, programs, policy, organizational decisions, etc.<br>• Provide practical, actionable advice directly to clients in a way that significance does not get lost in jargon and technical details | • Salary varies widely but tends to be higher than in academia<br>• Compensation package can include salary and an annual bonus | • Internally focused reports and memos<br>• Externally focused reports, business plans, and business cases for key stakeholders<br>• External communications such as op-eds, consensus papers, reports, and policy briefs for broad audiences<br>• Depending upon the organization, write and produce scholarly publications and presentations on an occasional basis | • Depending upon the organization, work setting might be in-person, hybrid, or remote<br>• Organizational structure varies; some might involve a hierarchical management structure while others (often small businesses and professional service firms) might operate within a flatter structure<br>• Day-to-day activities tend to involve more team interaction than solitary research or writing<br>• Work often occurs in broader teams that span different aspects of the organization with a variety of expertise<br>• The organization typically defines priorities and research agendas so there can be less flexibility to pursue own research interests<br>• The ability to generalize research skills across fields, topics, and areas of inquiry is valued<br>• Work intensity varies widely by client, funding cycle, and schedule of deliverables<br>• The application of results can happen quickly<br>• Might not involve conducting research but applying research-related skills | • Economy, market-based factors, creativity, and innovation can determine career trajectory<br>• Regular development and evaluation of performance goals is required<br>• Performance of group outputs can be as equally important as individual output<br>• Participation in regular performance reviews is required<br>• Large Businesses: Pay for positions can vary widely but there is potential, over time, to reach high levels of compensation |




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# Nonprofit Organizations

Nonprofit organizations present another setting where psychologists can be employed. A nonprofit is a legal entity that is operated for a charitable or socially beneficial purpose. Nonprofits vary widely in their size and specific focus. Their work cultures and productivity requirements also vary, though they often have a hierarchical organizational structure, similar to corporations, with a board of directors and a CEO.

Nonprofit organizations' general focus on social challenges can make them an ideal home for psychological scientists. For example, nonprofits often administer or fund programs intended to produce some social good. Psychologists can be helpful in designing such programs, implementing the programs, and conducting research to empirically evaluate whether the programs are achieving their intended purpose. Many nonprofits rely heavily on the efforts of volunteers. Accordingly, psychologists working in a nonprofit may find themselves frequently interacting with, coordinating, and potentially even recruiting volunteers who help carry out the organizations' mission.

Like large and small businesses, nonprofits may not place job ads specifically seeking a psychologist. Instead, job ads are more likely to refer more generically to "behavioral science," "social science," or similar terms and job titles like "Science Officer" and "Program Officer/Manager." Further, it is important to look at the skills being sought and how they align with your strengths and training, regardless of the specific job title.

Many people find meaning and fulfillment in working for a nonprofit organization with a mission that aligns with their personal values. Salaries in the nonprofit sector vary, but on average they tend to be substantially lower than salaries in business and industry, and slightly higher than, or in line with, salaries in academia. All nonprofits have to publicly report (Form 990) salaries of the highest paid individuals in the organization, which provides an accessible way to research the range for management and consider what salaries might be for advertised roles and potential for career trajectories. ■

# Characteristics of Common Jobs for Psychological Scientists

| Setting | Typical Job Responsibilities | Salary & Resources | Writing Expectations | Work Environment | Advancement & Performance Evaluation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Non-Profits | • Develop, direct and manage projects<br>• Foster and sustain collaborative partnerships<br>• Advance stakeholders' interests<br>• Conduct research to inform the development and/or evaluation of projects, programs, policy, organizational decisions, etc.<br>• Apply existing research from the literature to inform the development and/or evaluation of projects, programs, policy, organizational decisions, etc. | • Salary varies widely but tends to be lower than in business and industry. Salaries are higher or at the same level as in academia | • Internally focused reports and memos<br>• Externally focused reports for key stakeholders<br>• External communications such as op-eds, consensus papers, reports, and policy briefs for broad audiences<br>• Potential to write and produce scholarly publications and presentations | • Depending upon the organization, work setting might be in-person, hybrid, or remote<br>• Shared organizational and team goals lend opportunities for collaboration with colleagues<br>• The organization typically defines priorities and research agendas so there can be less flexibility to pursue own research interests<br>• The ability to generalize research-related skills across fields, topics, and areas of inquiry is valued<br>• Work intensity can vary widely by schedule of deliverables<br>• Might not involve conducting research but applying research-related skills | • Regular development and evaluation of performance goals is required<br>• The performance of group outputs can be as equally important as individual output<br>• Participation in regular performance reviews is required |



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# Government

The federal, state, and local (e.g., county) government are major employers. Indeed, the federal government is the largest employer in the United States, with nearly 3 million people in its workforce. The government is also a large employer of psychologists.

Positions in government share some characteristics with the business and non-profit sectors. Of all the sectors described, government jobs may present the most hierarchical and structured work culture. For example, government positions often have clear levels of supervisory reporting lines, highly structured salary bands, and clear policies relating to employee schedules and benefits. Some government positions also require security clearances and adherence to strict policies regarding the sharing of information.

Roles in government can include conducting research or reviewing the literature to inform the development and/or evaluation of projects, programs, policy, or organizational decisions; reviewing funding opportunities; and working with external stakeholders (e.g., non-profit organizations, community groups) to advance knowledge and apply research to policies and programs. Public service provides the opportunity for psychological scientists to shape and translate research and focus science policy and funding to fill gaps in knowledge with the goal of improving the health and well-being of communities and society. Some government agencies offer visiting positions, which can help folks explore their potential interests before committing to this career path.

Some government positions are more influenced by changes in political administrations than others. In some positions, work priorities may change significantly as the result of a new leader taking office, for example. Certain other positions are more insulated from that political influence. Across most government positions, however, it is important to have an awareness of the major political and policy issues that may influence the context in which work is performed. For many people, a government position provides the opportunity to do high-quality work that has important, real-world impact while simultaneously having a well-structured work environment and, often, an excellent benefits package/pension. For some more information on how one might get a government position, see this example. ■

# Characteristics of Common Jobs for Psychological Scientists

| Setting | Typical Job Responsibilities | Salary & Resources | Writing Expectations | Work Environment | Advancement & Performance Evaluation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Government** | • Conduct research to inform the development and/or evaluation of projects, programs, policy, organizational decisions, etc.<br>• Foster and sustain collaborative partnerships with constituencies | • Salary varies widely and is dependent upon the organization/ department<br>• Generous benefits package<br>• Funds for professional development and travel can be limited | • Internally focused reports and memos<br>• Externally focused reports for key stakeholders<br>• External communications such as reports, consensus papers, presentations, and policy briefs | • Depending upon the organization and/or security requirements, work setting might be in-person, hybrid, or remote<br>• Tend to have hierarchical and structured work cultures with clear levels of supervisory reporting lines<br>• Shared organizational and team goals lend opportunities for collaboration with colleagues<br>• The organization typically defines research agendas so there can be less flexibility to pursue own research interests<br>• A structured work environment might lend less work on nights and weekends<br>• Work intensity varies widely by client, funding cycle, and schedule of deliverables<br>• Might not involve conducting research but applying research-related skills<br>• Ability to generalize research skills across fields, topics, and areas of inquiry is valued | • Regular development and evaluation of performance goals is required<br>• Participation in regular performance reviews is required<br>• Tend to operate within highly structured salary bands and clear policies related to employee benefits packages/pension<br>• Some positions may be influenced by changes in political administration |



# Conclusion

There are many positions available for doctorates in psychological science. All of these positions offer an opportunity to use the knowledge and skills obtained during graduate training to make a substantial and meaningful impact. Although many graduate students report feeling pressured to join academia to create new knowledge and share among other scientists, there are many other settings wherein psychological scientists can develop new knowledge about human behavior and/or translate, apply, or disseminate scientific knowledge. More scientists are needed in each of these roles, and all of these career options are outstanding uses of a doctoral degree in psychology. Psychological science suggests that finding a role in which we feel we have a purpose, a supportive environment, an opportunity we feel our skills are especially suited for, and an opportunity to make an impact in a way that fits our own values is most likely to lead to happiness and fulfillment in our professional lives. ■

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# Self-Assessment for a Satisfying Career Path

1. *What interests you most? What are you doing when you lose track of time?*

2. *What energizes you and gives you joy?*

3. *What do you see as your greatest strengths? Biggest learning and growth opportunities?*

4. *What are you doing when you feel most confident? Least confident?*

5. *What do you value most? How would the careers you are considering align with those values?*

6. *What are your greatest needs (e.g., social connection, power, flexibility, influence, achievement, recognition, purpose, balance, making a difference)? How would you best fulfill those needs in a career?*

7. *What kind of work would give you a sense of purpose and be personally and socially fulfilling?*

8. *What do you find intrinsically motivating and what are some extrinsically motivating factors for you?*

9. *What goals and rewards do you seek in a career (e.g., personal achievements and/or collaborative wins)?*

10. *What kind of impact do you want to have in your career?*

11. *What environments bring out your best?*

12. *Do you gravitate toward environments supporting autonomy or a more structured work environment? How will know that you found the environment you are looking for?*

13. *What kind, and how much interaction with others are you seeking in your career? Do you prefer to work autonomously or in groups and teams? Do you prefer one-on-one interaction or teamwork?*

14. *What do you need in a workplace to feel welcomed, supported, and growth-oriented?*

15. *What do you need to achieve work-life balance?*

16. *What excites you the most and worries you as you consider making a career decision?*

17. *How do you make important life decisions? What helps and what gets in the way?*

18. *What role do relationships play in your career decision-making process? What role would you like them to play?*

19. *What is standing in the way of deciding on a career path? What barriers do you anticipate encountering and how will you handle them?*

20. *Which career paths have you ruled out or overlooked and why? What assumptions do you hold about your ability to be successful and satisfied in these careers? What evidence supports those assumptions?*