Psychology Major Options: BA or BS?

Both the BA and the BS provide a broad foundation in psychology. Your choice will depend on the kinds of courses you wish to take outside of psychology and how much your future plans require undergraduate coursework in math and science.

BA: Bachelor of Arts in Psychology

- About 75% of psychology majors at UNC complete a BA.
- The breadth of psychology courses taken for a BA is good preparation for graduate school in psychology.
- The BA gives students greater freedom to select courses they wish to complete for general education requirements and electives.

BS: Bachelor of Science in Psychology

- The BS requires more math, physical science, life science, and laboratory courses from other departments.
- The BS is appropriate preparation for a more science-based career, such as lab research or medicine.
- The BS is appropriate for a student who wishes to specialize in quantitative psychology, behavioral neuroscience, or biological psychology.

Should I do a BA or BS if I want to go to graduate school?

Psychology graduate programs do not care whether you have a BS or a BA. Having a BS does not give you any special advantage when applying to psychology graduate programs. Graduate programs focus on the following factors when evaluating applicants:

- Overall GPA
- GRE scores
- Psychology courses completed
- Grades in psychology courses
- Research experience
- Letters of recommendation
- Personal statement
- For some clinical and counseling psychology programs: Volunteer or paid work in a setting in which you have helped people

For More Information

1. Academic Worksheets: The worksheets for the BA and BS in psychology are available online from the Academic Advising Program. Go to advising.unc.edu and look for the link for “academic worksheets.” Each worksheet shows all of the general education requirements as well as the specific requirements for the major.
2. Academic Advising: To declare your major or to ask an academic advisor to complete a worksheet for you, you must make an appointment to see an advisor in the Academic Advising Program. Use the online scheduling system to make your appointment. Go to advising.unc.edu and look for the link to “Schedule an Appointment.”
3. Psychology Department Faculty: Several faculty members are available to answer questions about psychology courses, research opportunities, and other matters specific to the psychology major. The current list of faculty advisors is on the Psychology Department website at psychology.unc.edu/undergraduate-studies.
What Can I Do With a Psychology Major?

What will I learn?

Psychology is the scientific study of human behavior and mental processes. As you complete courses for the psychology major, you will learn about research methods and statistics as well as concepts in several subareas of psychology, such as developmental, cognitive, clinical, social and behavioral neuroscience. Some employers favor psychology majors because they usually develop the following skills as they study psychology:

- Research skills which can be applied in a wide variety of settings
- Quantitative reasoning skills (i.e., knowing how to make judgments with statistics)
- Understanding and applying scientific reasoning
- Application of knowledge and concepts to real-life situations
- Critical thinking and logical analysis
- Appreciation for diversity
- Computer skills
- Communication skills

Will I Get a Job?

With an undergraduate degree, jobs loosely related to psychology are abundant, and jobs specifically related to psychology are more difficult to find. Jobs loosely related to psychology include jobs in administrative support, public affairs, education, business, sales, service industries, health care, computer support, human resources, personnel, public relations, and many others. A job more specifically related to psychology may include working in a group home as a direct care provider, or working as a research assistant to help carry out psychological research. Students seeking the most intensive psychology-related careers and those who wish to become psychologists will need to complete at least a graduate degree.

How Much Money Will I Make?

Income varies greatly depending on the type of job you obtain upon graduation. The National Association of Colleges and Employers reports that the Spring 2011 national salary average for psychology majors was $40,611. Remember that this is the median, and how much any individual earns is influenced more by their skills, personal characteristics, and unique experiences than by their psychology coursework. In addition, geography and the location of the position can have a significant impact on salary as well.

For more information:

1) University Career Services, 2nd floor Hanes Hall careers.unc.edu
2) Careers in Psychology by the American Psychological Association, available online: apa.org/careers/resources/guides/careers.aspx