

Belmont University **Psychology Department**

PsychSource #2

Why Major in Psychology?

You may find yourself wondering whether a psychology major is the "right" choice for you. Some people will ask, "What will you do with a psychology major?" Others will point out that studying psychology does not provide training for a specific job. If this is true, then why major in psychology?

Actually, there are several very good reasons for studying psychology at Belmont University. Although it is true that a major in psychology does not prepare you for a specific professional position like majors in accounting or nursing, the study of psychology is very relevant to a wide range of occupations. Psychology entails an examination of the human condition that incorporates material from the natural sciences, social sciences, and the humanities. Therefore, a psychology major serves as the basis for an excellent liberal arts education and provides the background for many entry-level positions in fields such as human services, administration, community relations, research, human resources, public relations, mental health care, marketing research, and teaching.

A psychology major also serves as a marvelous introduction to the world of scientific inquiry. Psychology students learn about the important concepts that underlie current scientific thought, and they receive training in the application of psychological research methods. Through their course work, students are challenged to question their own ideas about human behavior and to engage in critical thinking about the ideas of others. The research and evaluation skills provided by a psychology major are an asset to anyone who seeks to achieve a more complete understanding of human behavior. They are invaluable to students who wish to contribute to the advancement of knowledge as members of the scientific community. Finally, these skills are very marketable in a variety of employment settings, such as advertising, marketing, health care, or administration, where knowledge of research design, statistics, questionnaire construction, and professional writing is a valuable asset. Psychology majors learn these and other marketable skills.

For students interested in pursuing a career within the field of psychology or closely related fields, a psychology major is clearly a logical beginning. While there are many jobs available in the human service and mental health areas for an individual with a bachelor's degree, the field of psychology, like medicine or law, requires additional education to become a professional. Most professional positions in psychology, counseling, and social work require advanced degrees (master's, specialist, or doctorate) for appropriate licensure and career advancement. Each state has laws which restrict certain titles (e.g., psychologist, professional

counselor, social worker) and activities (e.g., the diagnosis and treatment of mental disorders, the administration of tests for psychological evaluation or counseling) only to those individuals holding advanced degrees. Thus, if you eventually want to pursue a career as a professional psychologist, counselor, or social worker, it would be advisable for you to view a psychology major as a "pre-professional degree" (like pre-law or pre-med) and prepare for graduate study at some time in your future. The psychology major at Belmont University offers a solid educational foundation, including specific course work required for application to many graduate programs, for those students who eventually plan to work toward advanced degrees in the field.

A major in psychology also provides excellent background for persons interested in teaching in schools or training individuals across the life-span in non-traditional educational settings. For example, our courses provide preparation for those entering a post-baccalaureate teacher certification program. A psychology background is particularly useful for individuals who plan to teach children in preschool, elementary school, or middle school, as well as disabled children in special education. A psychology major also is useful for those who teach or train adolescents or adults in settings such as sheltered workshops for the disabled, half-way houses for individuals being integrated into the community, or at social service agencies providing assistance to those in need.

Finally, the study of psychology is an excellent means of achieving a deeper understanding of yourself, your personal development, and how you interact with people and situations in daily life. If you are interested in furthering your growth as a person, then a psychology major is a very good choice indeed. Few academic majors rival psychology as a way of fostering one's own personal development.

Whatever your motivation for majoring in psychology at Belmont, you have chosen a program of study that will provide you with information and skills useful in the pursuit of your goals long after graduation. You have selected a department characterized by high-quality students and a concerned faculty which is dedicated to teaching excellence. Take the time to become thoroughly involved in your course work. Get to know both your fellow students and the faculty by participating in psychology department activities. Such involvement is the key to making the most of your experience as a psychology student at Belmont University and preparing you for your future success.

Portions of this handout were adapted from Handbook of the Marion College Psychology Department (Appleby, 1990) and the Psychology Major Handbook for Students Majoring Psychology at James Madison University. More information about job opportunities with your bachelor's degree and preparing for graduate school appear in separate PsychSource flyers available from the department or your psychology advisor. Portions of this handout were adapted from PSYCSERIES, Kennesaw State University, Marietta, Georgia.