**Feasibility Analysis of a Professional Psychology Career**

**for**

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**March 15, 2019**

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1. **Introduction**

Over the years, psychology has quickly become one of the most popular university degrees. Undergraduates obtaining a degree in psychology possess strong critical analysis skills, increased social awareness, and the ability to evaluate human behavior to maximize productivity, all of which are valuable assets in most professional industries. Whether in business administration, education or social work, most psychology undergraduates seek employment shortly after graduating. However, if students want to work more directly in the field of psychology assessing, diagnosing, and treating mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders, professional psychology may be an attractive career choice. A career in professional psychology is extremely competitive and requires rigorous postgraduate training but is highly rewarding. Students need to identify their desired career path to becoming a professional psychologist.

Undergraduate psychology students should consider a career in professional psychology based on their credentials, interests, expectations and possible training paths. A professional psychology career is a feasible career for anyone who wants to gain proficiency in an area of psychological specialization and increased opportunities to work in diverse areas of psychology. Job prospects in the field of psychology are much better for individuals with graduate degrees.

What specific type of work do professional psychologists perform? *The College of Psychologists of British Columbia* offers this job description:

Professional psychologists provide services to manage and enhance the cognitive, behavioural, emotional, interpersonal and physical functioning of individuals or groups of individuals, primarily by applying and using psychological assessment and intervention strategies, including psychometric testing and psychotherapy.  As part of this work, psychologists also assess and diagnose behavioural, emotional, cognitive and mental disorders (CPBC, date, p.#)

Psychology undergraduates interested in professional psychology need a better understanding of their career pathways and professional preparation. Prospective students need answers to the two following fundamental questions:

1. *Is this the right career for me?*
2. *If so, how do I enter the field?*

To help answer these questions, this report analyzes information gathered from professionals and psychology graduate students, as well as from a literature review. After defining *professional psychology*, the following analysis examines the field’s employment outlook, required skills and personality characteristics, career benefits and drawbacks, and various entry options.

UBC graduate psychology students responded to a short survey designed to analyze various training paths, required skills, and career goals in the professional psychology field. A comparative analysis of three career paths was performed to determine the relative advantages of each path. In addition, informational interviews were conducted with two psychology professors at UBC to investigate the benefits and consequences of the career, job description and work setting, and advice for interested undergraduate students. An analysis of potential advantages and drawbacks was performed to determine the feasibility of pursuing a career in professional psychology. A literature review including review papers on career planning and government reports was conducted to investigate employment outlook, work responsibilities, and training paths.

A significant limitation to this study, is the lack of primary data on the Psy D doctoral program as there isn’t a Psy D graduate program offered at UBC. Informational interviews are an excellent primary source of information, but an expert’s opinion is not always reliable and may be biased. Both informational interviews are with professors in academia/research, therefore, their descriptions and advice given may not apply to those who are more interested in private practice or those who want to enter the field through a Psy D. program.

**II.Data Section**

**A.Key Factors in a Professional Psychology Career**

UBC psychology students need to consider their intellectual abilities, interests, skills, and values when considering the fit of a professional psychology career. They must know the depth and scope of their capacities and interests so that they can measure these against the requirements of this field.

**1.Responsibilities of a Professional Psychologist:**

Psychologists study how people think, feel and behave from a scientific perspective and then apply this knowledge to explain, understand and change people’s behavior. Psychologists responsibilities can primarily be separated into two categories: research and practice.

***Research***

Research psychologists use the scientific method to design studies, collet data, examine results, and report findings. Most research psychologists work as researchers and faculty at universities allowing them access to human and physical resources to carry out their studies.

Insert – Findings from Informational interviews with Dr. Odic and Dr. Steven Barners: work setting, job description

***Practice***

Practicing psychologists work with individuals experiencing various disorders or difficulties. Their career focus is to help alleviate or remove the mental and emotional symptoms individuals experience I order to live full, healthy lives. Practicing psychologists can work in a variety of settings including: hospitals, schools, clinics, correctional facilities, and private offices.

**2.Employment Outlook**

Employment of psychologists is expected to grow 14% from

(Figure 1)

(insert figure of average growth rate- graph of employment trends)

Figure 1 The Employment Outlook for Professional Psychology

*Source: Data from U.S. Department of Labor (date).* Occupational Outlook Quarterly, *pg#*

**3.Technical Skills Required**

Insert – Findings from:

a) Informational interviews with Dr. Odic and Dr. Steven Barners: work setting, non-psychology-related activities, and job description  
b) Survey of graduate psychology students preparing to enter the field: ranking of skills, factors of successful individuals in the field

**4.Other Skills and Qualities Required**

Insert – Findings from: a) Informational interviews with Dr. Odic and Dr. Steven Barners: advice, non- psychology-related activities  
b) Survey of graduate psychology students preparing to enter the field: advice, factors of successful individuals in the field

(Figure 2)

(Insert figure)

Describe soft skills – get a lot of data from primary sources – characteristics that an ideal candidate has

Figure 2 Requirements for a Professional Psychology Career (includes a summary figure of key responsibilities and most important skills)

**5.Advantages of the Career**

Insert – Findings from:   
a) Informational interviews with Dr. Odic and Dr. Steven Barners: Best thing about the field, advice

**6.Drawbacks of the Career**

Insert – Findings from:

a) Informational interviews with Dr. Odic and Dr. Steven Barners: least favorite thing about the field

**B. A Comparison of Entry Options** (analysis of survey and informational interview data on topics related to training/education)

**1.Option 1: Master’s Degree**

**2.Option 2: Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)**

**3.Option 3: Doctor of Psychology (PsyD)**

**4.An Overall Comparison by Relative Advantage**

Table 1 compares the three entry options

Table 1Relative Advantages Among Three Professional Psychology Entry Options

(insert table)

1. **Conclusion**

**A. Summary of Findings**

include summary of survey and interview results

**B. Interpretation of Findings**

include summary of survey and interview results and explain why

**C. Recommendations**

Clearly, deciding if a career in professional psychology is the right choice is an imperative question to answer. Therefore, anyone considering a career in clinical psychology should follow these recommendations:  
• Speak to practising psychologists such as members of state associations and psychologists at APA’s Annual Convention to gain invaluable advice that can help you make a proper career choice.  
• Explore different career choices by researching career profiles and volunteering (i.e. local agencies in your community or psychology research labs)  
• Weigh the implications of each career path (work environment, salary, job outlook, cost of training, length of post-doctorate training option: masters vs. doctorate)

**References**

<include rest of sources here, including survey>

**IV. Appendices**

**Appendix A: Student Survey Questions**

1. Please indicate the graduate degree(s) you are earning/earned: (Select all that apply)
2. MA/MS
3. Ph.D
4. Psy.D.
5. Other Doctorate (please specify)
6. Is/was the primary emphasis of your graduate training: (Mark one only)
7. Research training
8. Clinical service
9. Both research and practice
10. Other (please specify)
11. What is/was the duration of your graduate training? (In months)
12. Please describe your career goals and interests once finished your graduate training?
13. Rank the skills necessary to excel as a professional psychologist in order of importance(from 1- 6, 1 being most important).
    1. Interpersonal skills
    2. Observational skills
    3. Integrity
    4. Patience
    5. Problem-solving skills
    6. Analytical skills
14. What factors differentiate those who succeed from those who fail at this occupation?
15. If you had the choice, would you again choose psychology as your field?
16. Yes
17. Not sure
18. No
19. What advice would you give prospective psychology students who want to be successful in the field?

**Appendix B: Informational Interview Questions**

1. What training is required (or most typical) for a professional psychology degree?
2. What is your primary work setting?
3. In just a few words, how would you describe your job? What are the primary activities you engage in?
4. What skills can help someone excel in this field?
5. What makes your field most unique from some of the other fields?
6. What other non-psychology-related activities does your job entail that you did not expect? For example, does your job include accounting, business administration, or other activities?
7. What is the best thing about your field? What would you tell an undergraduate psychology student to encourage them to enter your field?
8. What is your least favorite thing about your field? What would you tell a college student to discourage them to enter?
9. What advice would you give prospective psychology students who want to be successful in the field?