

## January 2021

Seniors – Search and apply for scholarships that match your qualifications

Seniors – File any additional college applications

## February 2021

### 6<sup>th</sup> – ACT and ACT plus Writing

(register by 1/15)

Juniors – Begin your college search utilizing college websites, virtual tours and information sessions

Juniors – Map out dates and prepare for spring SAT and/or ACT exams

Seniors – Contact colleges to be sure your applications are complete. Send mid-year grades if required. Update colleges with any new information that might influence admission

## Making Sense of College Rankings

Although this article is directed to students just beginning their college search, it will also be useful to seniors in making their final choice of college to attend. This is especially true this year since so many applicants have been unable to make an in-person campus visit.

For many students and parents, one of their many early college research options is to go directly to those famous lists of college rankings. The assumption is that if a college is 'ranked' highly by this or that publication, it must therefore be a 'good' or even 'great' college. International families, especially, often turn to the 'ratings' because in many other countries the hierarchy of universities' reputations is clearly defined and known, and families want their children to study only at renowned American institutions. This phenomenon has often accounted for huge increases in applications to colleges at the top of those rankings from students in Asia.

Colleges and universities create beautiful books that can be shared with donors, other (competing) universities, magazine publishers, and alumni. These 'brag books' highlight student achievements, research advancements, faculty superstars and new campus construction projects. The data is used to impress academic institutions and publishers who put together college rankings because, for a college, its reputation is everything. Higher education is intensely competitive and a university's placement in the rankings is a huge force behind their many fiscal decisions, enrollment numbers

and employment opportunities. When a college rises into the top 20-25 positions in the annual *U.S. News and World Report*, its application volume can and will increase by about 5%-10%. Even one simple step up the list can increase applications by about 1%. The clear correlation between national/global rankings and application volume is often reflected in colleges' decisions on selectivity, standardized test scores and high school rank. Unfortunately, students are often the losers in this 'game', especially students of color and low-income applicants.

In order to make sense of this academic 'race', first understand how the rankings are created. In 1983, the *U.S. News & World Report* published its first list of "America's Best Colleges" based upon college presidents' responses to survey questions. This list has now become the most popular college ranking tool, developing into a far more sophisticated objective ranking, using complex methodology. So, what matters to colleges and how are the rankings created? Typically, they analyze the following: graduation and retention rates, academic reputation, faculty resources, student selectivity, financial resources, and alumni giving. There are other ranking lists that also review the quality of the faculty, the volume of research, employer reputation, student/faculty ratio and international student/faculty ratio.

As an applicant, you must first know what matters to you during your college experience. For example, you may place great value on employment (continued on p. 3)

## Career Paths for Psychology Majors

- Advertising / Marketing / Media Personnel
- Business executive/ Entrepreneur
- Clinical Psychologist
- Cognitive Psychologist
- Criminal Investigator
- Developmental Psychologist
- Educational Psychologist
- Environmental Psychologist
- Evolutionary Psychologist
- Experimental Psychologist
- Forensic Psychologist
- Human Resource Personnel
- Industrial-Organizational Psychologist
- Marriage & Family Therapist
- Neuropsychologist
- Politician
- Psychiatric Technician
- Psychiatrist
- Psychometrist/ Clinician
- Rehabilitation Psychologist
- School Counselor
- Social Psychologist
- Sports Psychologist
- Substance Abuse Counselor
- Teacher
- Writer

## Majoring in Psychology

If you are interested in the motivations behind peoples' behaviors, you might be interested in a major in psychology. Psychology is the study of the workings of the human mind from both factual and theoretical points of view.

Because psychology is founded on research, undergraduates will begin with a variety of core courses covering research methods, experimental psychology and statistics as well as an introductory course in psychology. After establishing a base in the field, students will typically take courses from a range of concentrations. Examples include developmental psychology (which addresses the lifespan of childhood, adolescence, maturity and old age), or experimental psychology (including sense perception, learning and biological psychology). Students will earn either a Bachelor of Science or a Bachelor of Arts degree. A Bachelor of Science will require more math and science courses while a Bachelor of Arts will require humanities courses and perhaps the study of a foreign language.

Some psychology programs are lecture based while others are research and lab based. In a lab-based program, students may run experiments on animals and humans, using advanced equipment. Other research includes analyzing beliefs and attitudes through surveys, designing experimental and control groups, and observing social situations.

Programs also vary in the presentation of the curriculum. While some concentrate on scientific research, or on psychology as a liberal art, others have a pre-professional focus, emphasize the practical application of research, or offer internships in organizational or mental health services.

A major in psychology can lead to a variety of job opportunities in several fields. Human resources is a great field for those who enjoy problem-solving. These departments are responsible for interviewing and hiring candidates to fill job openings, training new members, and dealing with interpersonal conflicts within a company.

Students who enjoy sales and advertising can find jobs in this market utilizing psychological skills to analyze, interpret, and ultimately make use of consumer habits and tendencies. Advertising and sales departments are also a part of a wide variety of organizations, including the non-profit sector.

Students who want to work with families, children, or education may become social workers, counselors, or teachers. Becoming a teacher will require an additional degree in education. A social worker's job is to help their clients, often families or individuals, handle problems in their everyday lives. Clinical social workers can also diagnose mental health or behavioral issues and help clients deal with them. Students may choose to study social work in addition to psychology to help prepare for this career. Clinical social work often requires an MA degree.

Students who are interested in aiding criminal offenders can become parole officers. Parole officers monitor offenders to ensure they are complying with the terms of their parole, help them get into programs that they may need for issues such as anger management or substance abuse, and prevent or deal with relapses of behavior. The job requires good communication skills. Parole officers also work with the families of the offenders and social workers or psychologists on the case.

If students want to work directly with people to help them fight mental disorders or improve personal relations, they may become psychiatrists or psychologists. Psychiatrists help patients using talk therapy and medication. They must have a medical degree, a specialty in psychiatry, and be licensed as a medical doctor and psychiatrist in their area. Psychologists use talk therapy and have either a PhD or a PsyD. Like psychiatrists, they must be licensed to work in their area.

For additional ideas, visit <https://www.apa.org/ed/precollege/psn/2018/01/bachelors-degree>.

### Financial Matters: Money for College



Money often plays a big factor in the pursuit of a college degree, but hopefully, will not stop anyone from attending college! Yes, college can be expensive, but there is aid available to help you and your family pay for college. Major sources of financial aid for college include:

**Grants** – Grants are “gifts” from the government and from individual colleges that reduce the cost of college. Grants are awarded based on your family’s financial situation. Colleges are the largest source of grants for higher education. The Federal Government and some state governments also offer grants to help students from lower income families pay for college costs. Grants do not have to be paid back or earned. Grants may be renewed every year you attend college, although if your family’s financial situation chang-

es, the amount you receive may also change.

**Merit scholarships** – Merit scholarships are offered by many colleges and private organizations. Scholarships are similar to grants in that they are a gift; you don’t have to repay them. Merit scholarships can be awarded for many reasons, including your grades, test scores, extracurricular activities, intended career or college major, and in some cases, your family’s financial situation. Some merit scholarships are only good for your first year of college; others may be renewed every year you attend college.

**Federal work study** – Work study is a program that allows students to earn money for college expenses by working in an on-campus job while they attend school. Usually, a work study job will help you pay for books and other personal expenses, but not tuition or your living expenses. Work study jobs often have flexible hours that make attending classes easy. Work study jobs can also be a great way to start building a resume. Work study does not have to be paid back, but is earned

over time as you perform your work-study job.

**Federal student loans** – The Federal government offers low cost student loans to help students and parents pay for college expenses. When used wisely, Federal student loans can be a good way to finance some college costs. Federal student loans have low interest rates and in most cases you won’t have to start paying them back until after you graduate. If you leave college without graduating, you will still be required to pay the loans back.

**Important tip:** Every college is required to provide families with an estimate of the amount of financial aid they may be eligible to receive. This estimate (while not a guarantee) can help you compare colleges and make sure your college list is financially feasible. To get the estimate, go to each college’s website and look for the Net Price Calculator, usually located in the financial aid section of college websites. To use the Net Price Calculator, you’ll need a copy of your family’s last tax return.

### Making Sense of College Rankings (continued from p. 1)

opportunities after graduation, but rankings rarely consider those numbers. You may also really want to focus on graduation rates and student debt, but don’t want or need to attend an expensive, albeit highly ranked institution, in order to achieve your goals. Dig deeper than simple rankings, compare them all and review methodologies.

You are choosing your new ‘home away from home’ and everything matters as you build your college list. Once it’s safe to do so, visit the campus in

person, take a tour if possible, check course offerings, academic and social support opportunities, location and general ethos. Let rankings be your first college research stop but don’t ever allow it to be your last stop.

There is no harm in using the rankings to start your journey. The lists give you a great deal of data that you should carefully review in order to personalize your needs. Then you can start comparing apples with apples – in other words, you’ll learn that it’s not reasona-

ble to compare the rankings of Yale University, currently ranked #3, with Eckerd College, currently ranked #140. Why? Because one is an outstanding national university and the other an excellent small liberal arts college. Does that mean Yale is better FOR YOU than Eckerd? No! Be clear on what you want, use the rankings as a way to learn more about options that fall within your personal and academic parameters - don’t simply focus on the beauty pageant lists but on what really matters to you.



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## Avoiding Senior Slump

Always a danger during second semester of senior year, Zoom fatigue threatens to create a possible pandemic of the dreaded senioritis. Check for tell-tale spots, or perhaps for a suspicious tan. Recurrent outbreaks of senioritis hit America's high schools each year, peaking when students return from winter break. After surviving SATs and ACTs (or the prep for and then cancellation of the same), after filling out seemingly endless college applications, after writing essay after essay in search of scholarship dollars, seniors often feel entitled to some down time. Moaning and groaning about workload, many seniors let their grades slip and assignments slide. Keeping their cameras off and volume on mute, some students effectively hide during Zoom sessions.

While their attitude is perhaps understandable, students must know that the second half of senior year is not a good time to slack off. Although colleges have contributed to the idea that "senior year grades don't count" by admitting so many students under the early options, it's important to remember that these same colleges want to see your final and often

your mid-year grades. A serious decline in the grade pattern that won you admission in the first place may lead to a letter from the admission director asking for an explanation. In some cases, accepted students have found their offers of admission rescinded. Even dropping classes after you've submitted your application requires an explanation and may trigger an academic review.

But why are colleges so fussy about senior year anyway? Concerns about ill-prepared students abound. Some colleges find that as many as two-thirds of entering freshmen require remedial classes before they can begin college-level work and many of these students never earn their college degrees. A demanding senior year schedule including honors and AP courses or an IB (International Baccalaureate) diploma will help to ensure that you have the skills needed to succeed in college. So, if there are signs of an outbreak of senioritis nearby, you might want to avoid those infected and prevent a nasty surprise letter from your first choice college.