

## *Alternative Majors for Students Interested in Psychology*

*Peer Advisors discuss comparable majors available to students.*

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**A** bachelor's degree with a major in psychology is fine preparation for many professions. After college you start to build job experience, and the skills developed on the job help you to advance as you move job to job. Typical college graduates have many different jobs before settling on one that they stay with for most of their career.

Most psychology majors don't attend graduate school immediately after receiving their bachelor's degree. They instead seek employment. A psychology degree helps build skills that are valuable for many occupations and career paths. Psychology majors learn how to approach and solve problems. You can see what's important in a particular situation, and know how to discover how similar problems were solved in the past. You know how to collect and analyze information and propose a solution. Your understanding of people and interpersonal skills help you work with coworkers, clients or customers. Your oral and written communication skills help you perform a wide variety of useful tasks. These skills apply to a wide range of careers including jobs in human services, mental health, and social services, or positions in business and industry.

Peer Advisors interviewed recent JMU psychology graduates who successfully pursued careers immediately following graduation. We asked these students how they obtained their job, what the job entails, and asked them to make suggestions that might help current students.

### **Social Work**

The Social Work Major is closely related to Psychology. Similar skills are used when working with people in social work and psychology. The social work major equips you to work with individuals and groups of all ages in various settings such as family and child services, medical social services, mental health centers, aging services, and juvenile or adult corrections, allowing for diverse experiences with many types of people. Social workers also work with communities and organizations to help improve social conditions and advocate for social change.

A major in social work can be declared at any point, but after completion of SOWK 287: Introduction to Social Work and SOWK 288: Social Welfare with a GPA of 2.0 or higher, students complete an Admissions process. The student's life and work experience, as well as community service, is evaluated and three letters of recommendation are reviewed before a decision of acceptance into the program. Once in the major, the focus is on simultaneously developing your knowledge, skill and value base. The culmination of the social work degree is the field practicum semester in which a student works 32 hours/week in an agency setting for a minimum of 472 hours of supervised practice. There are also many opportunities for involvement and community service including membership into organizations such as the Social Work Organization, Phi Alpha National Honor Society, and the National Association of Social Workers.

There are many opportunities for immediate employment or further graduate study for a Social Work major to consider after graduation. Students can develop people skills through the Social Work Major and engage in a career in which they can make a genuine difference in people's lives. R. Ann Myers, Head of the Social Work Department, says "If you are looking for a career option with meaning, action, diversity, an abundance of options, and a chance to make a difference, Social Work could be the major for you." For a list of the skills developed through the Social Work Major, along with career options, visit the Social Work major website at: <http://www.jmu.edu/socwork/swacc.htm> .

## **Sociology**

The primary goal of the Sociology Major is to develop students' understanding of the patterns of social relations; the varied and contested nature of all views of the social world; and the current techniques used in the study of the social components of philosophy, science, technology, education, work and media. Students who major in Sociology focus on interactions among people, groups, and institutions in society. Dr. Mary Lou Wylie, the Sociology Department Head, feels that in comparison with the psychology, sociology generally takes a broader view of society, and students examine a more extensive array of social issues.

To earn either a B.A. or a B.S. degree with a Sociology major, students must complete a minimum of 39 credit hours in Sociology. Of these credit hours, 21 are required courses; the remaining 18 credit hours are electives chosen from over 20 Sociology courses, such as Politics in Society, Social Deviance, Social Gerontology, Race and Ethnic Relations, and Sociology of Gender. According to Dr. Wylie, the Sociology program emphasizes undergraduate research. By the time of graduation, each student will have completed at least four individual research projects.

Students who major in Sociology gain many marketable skills such as increased general knowledge, broadened viewpoints informed by sociological perspectives, sensitivity to organizational issues and social change, and skills in critical thinking, analysis, writing and communication, examination of attitudes and values, and computer skills. Students majoring in Sociology develop an understanding of how our society works.

There are many opportunities for student involvement within the major including membership in Alpha Kappa Delta, the Sociology Club, and the Sociological Honorary Society. The Student Research Symposium allows students to present their research in a professional setting and serve as session organizers, presenters, and discussants.

Working as a professional sociologist most often requires a graduate degree. However, students with an undergraduate background in Sociology have many different career paths from which to choose. The following careers, some supplemented with collateral training, are examples representative of previous graduates from the Sociology Department at JMU: Criminologist, police officer, professor, social worker, researcher, case manager, admissions officer, demographer, nursing home director, epidemiologist, mediator, congressional aide, writer/author, sociologist, secret service agent, personnel administrator, and public relations specialist.

For more information on the Sociology Major, consult the website at <http://www.jmu.edu/sociology>.

## Health Science

Health Science is a comprehensive major with eight concentrations and four minors available. The general program involves a wide spectrum of courses in health and other related science courses. The program's goal is to educate students for professional practice in a way that promotes the health and well being of individuals and communities. This program is similar to psychology since health sciences studies the functions of the body and mind, their care and welfare, and the effects of disruption.

The various health sciences concentrations are provided for individuals interested in specializing in a specific professional area. These areas include Dietetics, Health Services Administration, Athletic Training, Health Assessment and Promotion, School Health Education, Public Health Education, Basic Health, Physician Assistant Program, and Occupational Therapy. The four minors include Public Health, Health Information Systems, Substance Abuse Intervention, and Nutrition. Acceptance into the specialized programs is competitive and admission into the University does not guarantee admission into any of the programs. Each concentration and their requirements and credit hours can be found on the Health Sciences website, <http://www.healthsci.jmu.edu/undergrad>.

There are many extra curricular activities that complement the Health Sciences Major. Students may join the Student Athletic Trainers Association, the Health Sciences Honor Society Eta Sigma Gamma, the Physician Assistant Student Society, Student Occupational Therapy Association, Pre-OT Society, or the Pre-PT Society. There are many out-of-classroom learning experiences for students in the major, such as internships, field placement in hospitals, long-term care facilities, and practica in high schools. Students can become members in professional organizations, attend state and national workshops or conferences, and help to organize campus-wide activities.

The Health Sciences Major opens doors to many careers and possibilities. Some future professions of Health Sciences majors include: Athletic trainer, dietician, health administrator, occupational therapist, physician assistant, or public health educator. With the completion of the PA and OT programs and the passing of a licensure exam, individuals are ready to practice; although further study is encouraged and needed to excel in the field.

## Communication Sciences Disorders

The Communication Sciences Disorders (CSD) Major teaches students how to test, treat, and ultimately help people of any age who have difficulty hearing and/or speaking. The CSD Major offers students a broad background in social, physical, and biological sciences, as well as oral and written communication skills. The Department Head, Dr. Bankson, said, "If you like to work with people, have an interest in the art and science of communication, including disorders that may occur in communication, CSD may be the right major for you." A few examples of classes students typically take are Introduction to Speech and Language Disorders, Phonetic Transcription, Anatomy and Physiology of the Ear and Voice Mechanism, Language Development, and Introduction to Audiology. The major requires 48 hours of coursework.

CSD majors often join the National Student Speech-Language-Hearing Association, an organization devoted to professional development of students pursuing careers in speech-language pathology or audiology. It provides an opportunity for leadership development, continuing

education, and opportunities to participate in state and national conventions.

There are many potential career opportunities for CSD majors. A master's degree is the minimum requirement for certification by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association for Speech Pathology and a doctoral degree for Audiology. Career options include employment in hospital rehabilitation or school settings, supervisor of clinicians, speech or hearing scientist, and university professor. To find out more information about the CSD major, visit <http://www.csd.jmu.edu/>.

## Kinesiology and Recreation

The mission of the Kinesiology and Recreation Majors are to maximize the potential of individuals and society through the study of kinesiology and recreation. These majors prepare students to work in a recreation, sport, or physical fitness setting. They also provide students with a basic understanding of the disciplines of human physical activity, sport, and recreation. Within the Kinesiology Major, there are three main areas of concentration: Exercise Science and Leadership, Sport Management, and Physical and Health Education. The Recreation Major provides concentrations in Therapeutic Recreation and Recreation Management. Therapeutic Recreation prepares students to provide therapeutic recreation services to persons with disabilities in a variety of settings. Recreation Management prepares students to provide recreation services and leadership for careers in governmental agencies, private membership organizations, commercial recreation enterprises, corporate or employee recreation, armed forces recreation, and campus recreation.

Kinesiology Majors often join the Kinesiology service fraternity Phi Epsilon Kappa, whose activities include volunteer work, fundraising, and social activities. UREC, our university recreation center, offers many jobs and opportunities for Kinesiology majors to practice their skills. Within most of the concentrations, a practicum or internship is required, providing the student with additional experience.

There are many potential career opportunities for the Kinesiology Major including: Coach, exercise specialist, fitness facility manager, physical and health education teacher, recreation leader, recreational therapist, sport journalist, sport manager, or sport promoter. Some students attend physical therapy graduate programs or medical school. Kinesiology Majors have numerous opportunities to develop people skills and understanding of working with others, while also gaining business skills, such as accounting and finance.

This major does not necessarily require further graduate study. The necessity of continuing on to graduate school depends on the area of concentration. Most students majoring in exercise science do continue on, while those in physical education or sports management do not.

Dr. Michael Goldberger, director of the School of Kinesiology and Recreation Studies says, "Like psychology, kinesiology and recreation involves helping people; but the entry point is through the physical domain (sport, recreation, and fitness). The School of Kinesiology and

### Other Alternatives

We have just profiled a few of the many majors that may be of interest to students who like Psychology. Here are some other options that you should consider:

**Management.** Learn to work with people in a business setting. With a Human Resource Management concentration, your courses will focus on working with people. See <http://www.jmu.edu/management/> for more information.

**Nursing.** Prepare for a career as a health care professional. Nurses are among the highest paid health and human services professionals who enter their profession with a bachelor's degree. See

Recreation Studies prepares professionals in the areas of physical education, coaching, exercise science, recreation, therapeutic recreation, and sport management.”

For more information on the Kinesiology Major, visit: <http://www.jmu.edu/kinesiology/undergrad.html>.

## Conclusion

Psychology is an excellent major that is very popular, but there are many other majors available at JMU that can be a better fit with some student's individual interests. The Psychology Major is perfect for students who want to understand behavior from the perspective of the individual. It is a good liberal arts major, and the right choice for students interested in developing careers in psychology or counseling through graduate school. If your goal is similarly to help people, psychology is just one of the many campus majors that will help you achieve this objective. If you would like to further consider an alternative major, visit the office or the head or director of the major you would like to further consider and ask for assistance.

<http://www.nursing.jmu.edu> for more information.

**Speech Communication (SCOM).** Study the messages and outcomes of the human interactive process as it occurs in dyads, small groups, in organizations, and in public settings. See <http://www.jmu.edu/commstudies/> for more information.