

# Life After Graduation with a BA in psychology

Emily Randall, TA for Psy355  
University of North Carolina Wilmington



Don't freak out.  
You have options.

# Options

- Enter the working world
  - For-profit companies, nonprofits, government, education
- Grad school in psychology
  - Terminal master's, predoctoral master's, PsyD, PhD
- Higher education in a related field
  - Social work, education, gerontology, public health, medicine, physical therapy, rehabilitation, communications, business, marketing, public relations, human resource management, criminology, law, forensics, anthropology, neuroscience, human-computer interaction, urban/environmental planning, conflict resolution, pastoral counseling, etc.
- Certificate programs
  - [http://www.cvcc.edu/Health\\_Services/Polysomnography/index.cfm](http://www.cvcc.edu/Health_Services/Polysomnography/index.cfm)
  - [http://www.cvcc.edu/Health\\_Services/Electroneurodiagnostic.cfm](http://www.cvcc.edu/Health_Services/Electroneurodiagnostic.cfm)

# Marketable skills of psychology graduates

- Collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data
- Experience with statistics and experimental design (including survey design)
- An understanding of human development, childhood, and aging; psychopathology, criminal behavior, and substance abuse; learning and cognition; consumer behavior and preferences; groupthink, communication, relationships, social networks, etc.
- Students graduating with a BA in psychology “often possess good research and writing skills, are good problem solvers, and have well-developed, higher-level thinking ability when it comes to analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information. Most find jobs in administrative support, public affairs, education, business, sales, service industries, health, the biological sciences, and computer programming.”

# Areas of Need

- Underserved populations
  - Correctional centers
  - Chronically mentally ill
  - Veterans/military and their families
  - Youth/children (esp. with autism and other special needs)
  - Elderly/geriatric population
  - Retiring/aging “Baby Boomers”
- Health care administration, policy, and reform
- Holistic care teams
- Homeland security/anti-terrorism
- Bilingual skills

Source: APA Center for Workforce Studies (2010)

# PhD vs. Master's

## PhD

Extremely competitive

Must have a focus going in

Stipends

Deadlines are Nov-Jan

Takes longer (4-7 yrs)

Classwork, research, thesis,  
dissertation

Necessary to be a professor

## Master's

Easier to get in

Ability to discover or change  
focus/emphasis

Assistanceships (limited)

Deadlines are Jan-May

Takes 2-2.5 yrs

Classwork, research, thesis

Can teach at a community college  
or as a Lecturer

# PhD vs. Master's

1. Enter doctoral program with a BA and earn your MA along the way
  - Traditional path
  - Takes less time overall
2. Earn an MA before applying to PhD programs
  - Becoming more common
  - May make you a more attractive candidate for PhD programs because you will be more mature and have proven success at the grad level
  - Not all credits earned at the master's level will transfer. You may need to repeat coursework on the PhD level.
  - They should accept your thesis.

Most schools have either a PhD or master's-only program, not both.

A 1-year internship or practicum is required for clinical, counseling, school, and health service psychology programs.

# What grad programs look for

- Research and/or practicum experience
- A well-written, focused letter of intent
- Excellent letters of recommendation
- GPA (3.0 minimum; 3.5 is better)
- GRE scores (500 minimum; over 600 is better)
- PsyD programs emphasize practice over research. “In choosing applicants, these programs may look for candidates who already have clinical experience or other work experience in applied psychology.”

# What you should look for:

- Faculty match in research interests and philosophies
- Is the professor accepting new students that year? Do they seem interested in you? (E-mail them)
- Success of program graduates
- Financial assistance
- Visit the school – talk with current grad students
- Apply to as many schools as possible
- Avoid online programs

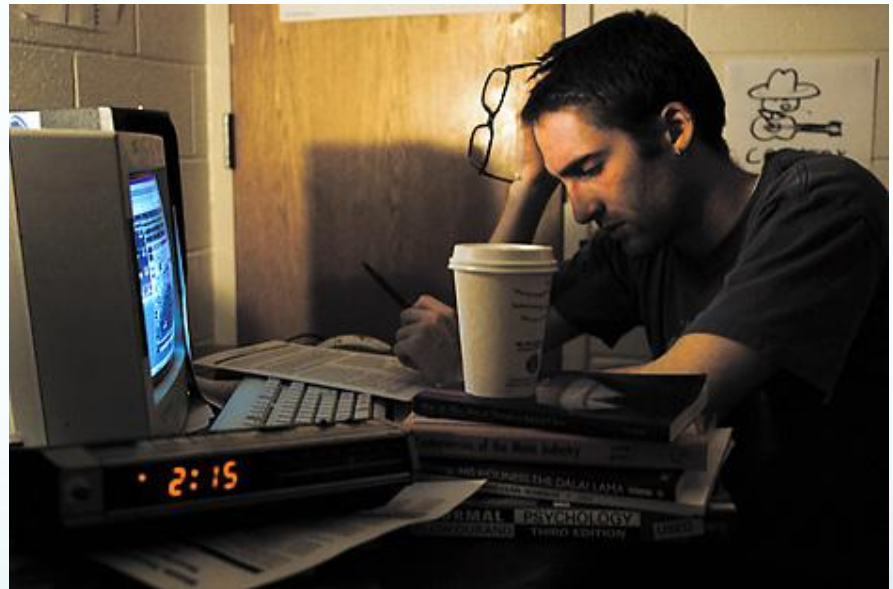
# Application materials

- Application (usually 1 for the graduate school and 1 for the department)
- Letter of intent/personal statement
- 3 letters of recommendation
- GRE general (some schools also require the subject test)
- Official transcripts from each undergraduate institution attended, including transferred credits
- Optional: academic curriculum vitae
- Fees
- Time

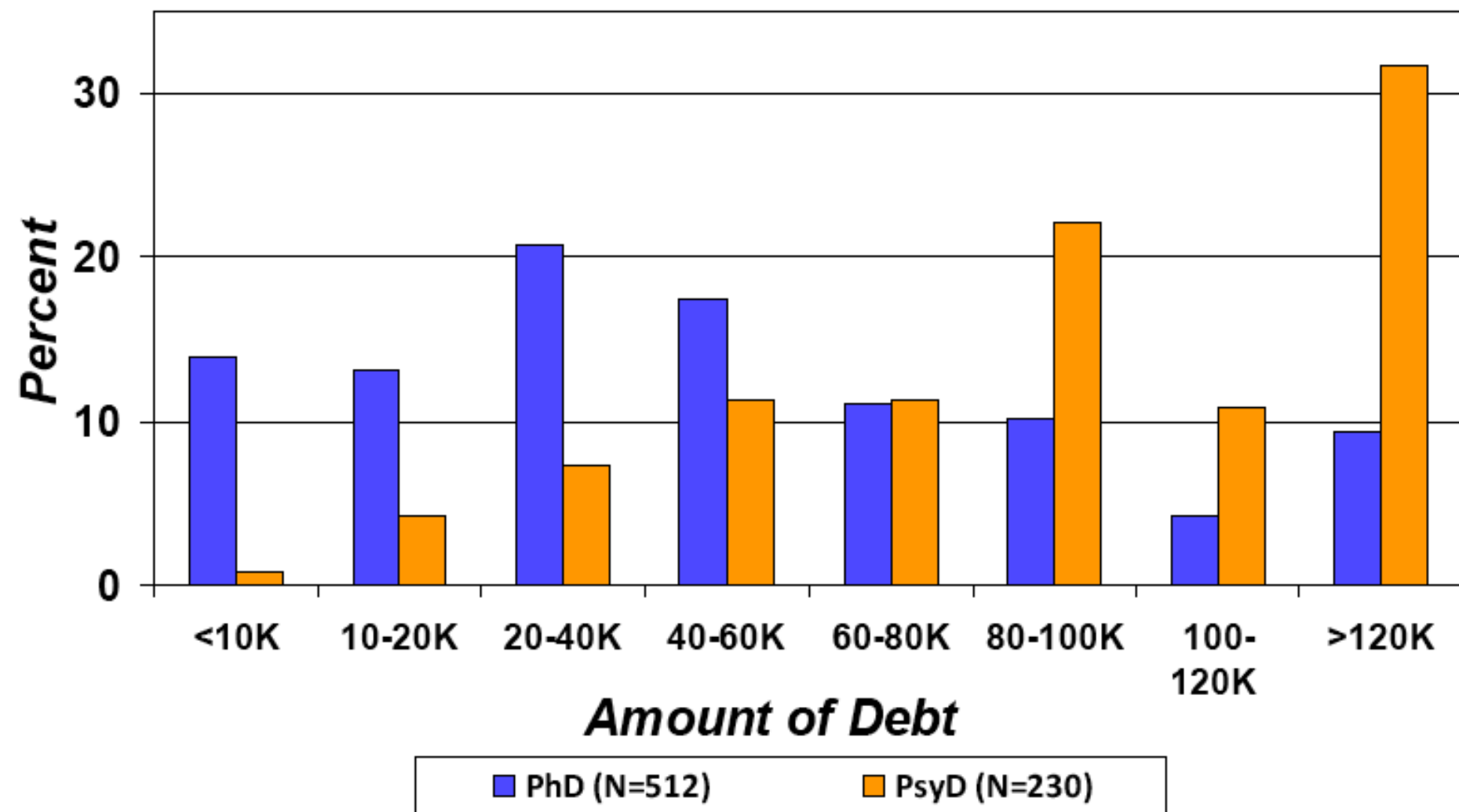
# Life as a grad student

## Time management and motivation are essential

- More demanding than undergrad – tougher exams, lots of reading, lab and thesis work
- Not much time for a job if you have an assistantship
- Not much free time, especially for those on clinical tracks
- But you learn a lot and schedule is somewhat flexible



# Level of Debt by Type of Degree for Recent Doctorates: 2007



# Expected salaries

Median annual full-time salaries for recent grads working in the field of psychology by degree type (data from 2006)

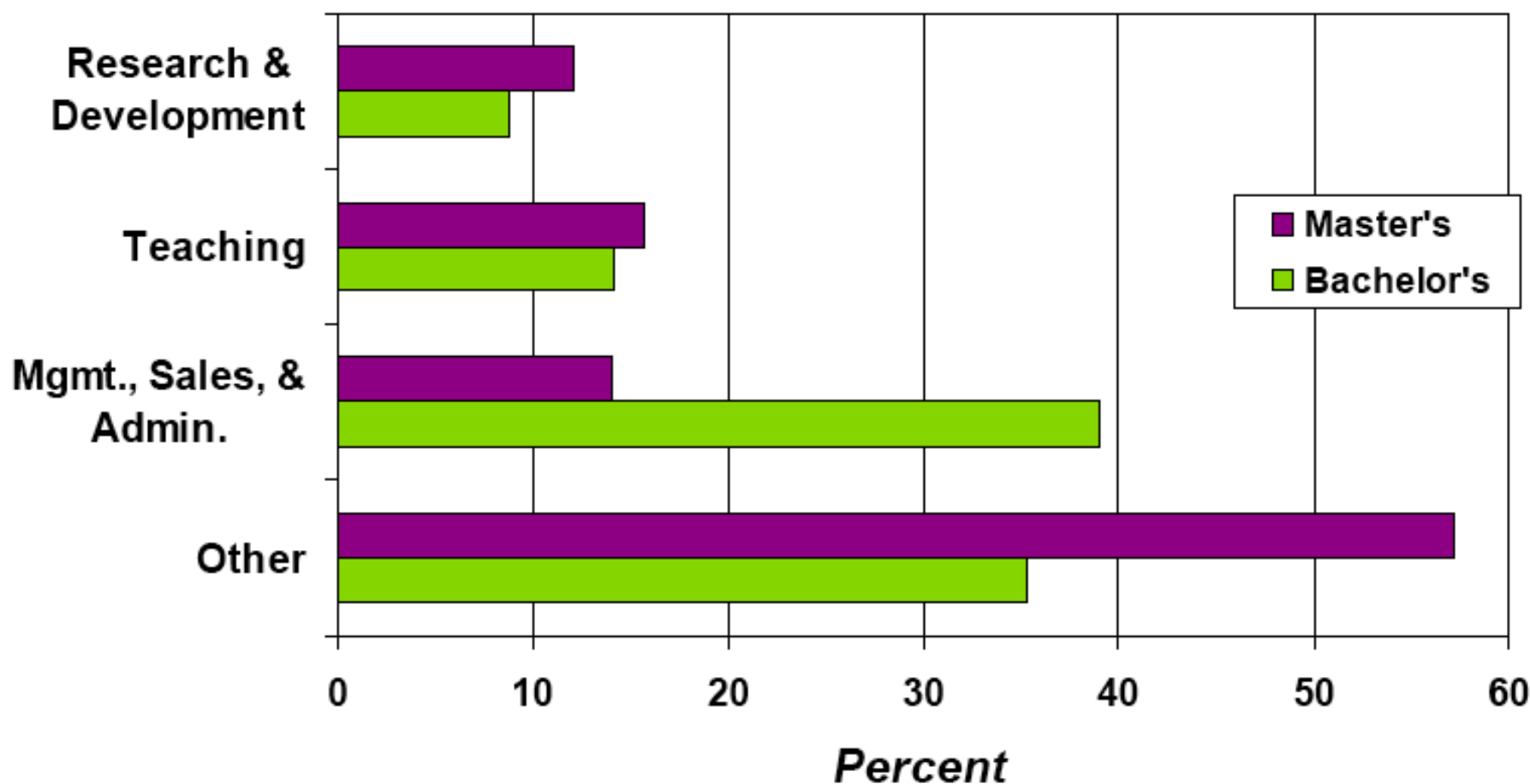
BA/BS: \$30,000

MA/MS: \$40,000

PhD: \$70,000

Source: APA Center for Workforce Studies (2010)

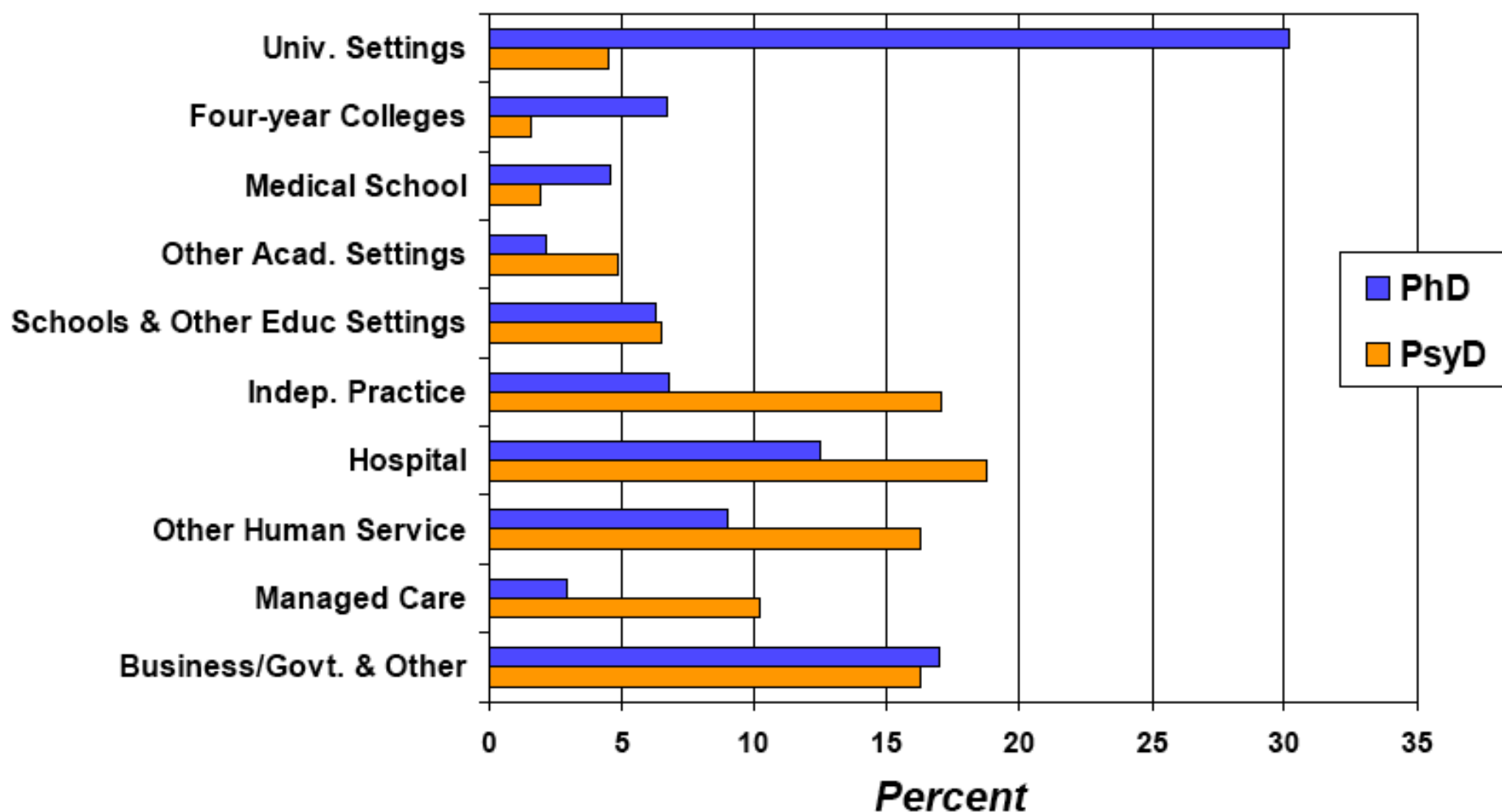
# Primary Work Activities of Recent Psychology Degree Recipients: 2003



Source: National Science Foundation/Division of Science Resources Statistics, *National Survey of Recent College Graduates* (2003). Compiled by the APA Center for Workforce Studies, April 2009.

Note. The use of NSF data does not imply NSF endorsement of the research, research methods, or conclusions contained in this report.

# Primary Employment Settings for Recent Doctorate Recipients in Psychology by Degree Type: 2007



Source: 2007 Doctorate Employment Survey. Compiled by the APA Center for Workforce Studies, June 2009.

Note. Table includes survey respondents with full- and part-time employment. Statistics are not included for settings where the total N is less than 20.

# Resources

- UNCW Career Center  
<http://www.uncw.edu/stuaff/career/>
- Career Development site at the APA:  
<http://www.apa.org/careers/resources/index.aspx>
- gradPSYCH magazine: <http://www.apa.org/gradpsych/>

# References

APA. (2010). *Careers in psychology*. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/careers/resources/guides/careers.aspx>

APA Center for Workforce Studies. (2010, August). *What can I do with a degree in psychology?* Presented at the 118<sup>th</sup> APA Annual Convention, San Diego, CA. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/workforce/presentations/2010-psychology-degree.pdf>