

PSYCHOLOGY PATHWAYS

HOW PSYCHOLOGY MAJORS GET INTO
GRADUATE SCHOOL AND LAUNCH CAREERS

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JOEL W. HUGHES, Ph.D.

Psychology Pathways:

How Psychology Majors Get Into Graduate School and Launch Careers

Joel W. Hughes, PhD

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Psychology Pathways: How Psychology Majors Get into Graduate School and Launch Careers by Joel Hughes

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I am obligated to uphold student privacy rights under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) and to safeguard the security and confidentiality of student information, which is further supported by the Ohio Revised Code Section 102. Therefore, all names of students have been changed. Names of individual and institutions (e.g., colleges and universities) will only be their actual names when necessary (e.g., I attended The Ohio State University) or when attributing credit (e.g., authors).

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Psychology Pathways:

Section 1: Preliminary Pontificating

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Chapter 3: Purpose over Passion. Or, You are the Master of Your Destiny, Sort of

“The dialogue clearly suggests that the primary value of college is economic, not social or developmental or cultural or intellectual. Go to college, get a credential, earn a living. A straight path.”

(McGee, 2015, p. 11).¹

Chapter 1

Before you Pick a Pathway. Or, Starting Out.

Agenda for Chapter 1:

- To introduce some problems that prevent psychology majors from getting into graduate school and/or launching a good career.
- To offer a metaphor that illustrates a contemporary real-world approach to finding better options.
- To provide some of Dr. Hughes’ experience and background as evidence of his credibility to help.
- To give some anecdotes that illustrate why you *can* succeed.
- To explain how to use this book.

Every week I have the same conversation.

Jacob, or Emily, or Michael, or Hannah show up in my office for faculty advising. They explain that they want to be a clinical psychologist, perhaps a forensic psychologist, or a physician. Then we talk about what that will involve. Sometimes Emily is absolutely on the right path, and she has what it takes to become exactly what she intends. She has been involved in faculty research. She has completed an internship. She has a high GPA. She is preparing for the entrance exam, fully expecting to get a good score. Her personal statement looks good, and she has three letters of recommendation lined up from respected faculty. Those conversations are a pleasure, and I have had many.

More often, Michael or Hannah or Jacob have no idea where to begin. Their GPA is too low, their exam scores are unknown and probably not going to be high enough, and they do not have much experience from internships or research laboratories. I am in the unfortunate position of having to tell them that they are not qualified to pursue a PhD, or a medical degree, or whatever graduate program they had their hopes set on. As the conversation progresses, it becomes more and more clear that they were just spitting in the wind and didn't really know what they want to do with their life or how graduate school admissions or finding a career actually works. I

become their dream crusher (as my daughter puts it). However, I only want to help. I am sympathetic because this was my story. This may be your story.

This is (almost) everyone's story.

True, there are the exceptional cases where a student can walk a straight path from high school through college to graduate school in the field of their choice, but that is an atypical situation. The rest of us are hopelessly naïve about how to find the right career or successfully campaign for admission to a competitive graduate program of study. Even at the “high end,” when I am talking to someone with a near perfect GPA and strong test scores, sometimes their personal statement is just incoherent, and the level of polish and shine on their case for admission to graduate school is just not there. They are not going to get in without some honest feedback and thick skin that humbly accepts constructive criticism.

Alternatively, some students are tired of school and want to get a job after they graduate, in which case they often have absolutely no idea how to proceed. I can also help these students because I have learned a lot about how to get a job. More on that later.

Current Approaches Don't Work

The approach that most students are currently using to choose careers or graduate schools simply is not working. Where did it come from? How do students even choose a major when they are 18 years old? According to recent research, the most influential sources for a student's choice of major are their parents and friends.² Parents and friends have good intentions and reflect the prevailing view that everyone should go to school, pick a major, get a degree, get a job, and make enough money to support a good life.³ As Jon McGee said in *Breakpoint: The Changing Marketplace for Higher Education*, “Go to college, get a credential, earn a living. A straight path.”⁴ Unfortunately, parents and friends are not necessarily the best fountains of wisdom to consult when embarking on a 4 to 5-year plan of study costing tens (hundreds?) of thousands of dollars.

Once students choose a major, they often buckle down and complete the curriculum as efficiently as possible without thinking much about the future until their junior or senior year. Then they come to me to ask what they should do after graduation or to describe their ambitions for graduate school.

Again, sometimes students are on exactly the right track.

I have advised students who were admitted to graduate programs in business, law, medicine, public health, and many fields of psychology including clinical psychology, industrial-organizational psychology, school psychology, and so on. This is a faculty advisors dream come true: successful graduates!

In other cases, students know that they have been avoiding planning for the future, and they're afraid of what they may hear me say. Sometimes they're right to be afraid. I am tired of having the conversation where I explain that someone is not going to graduate school under any circumstances, or that their job after graduation will probably be at a big box retail store instead of starting a white-collar career at an awesome Fortune 500 company with on-site daycare and free dry cleaning.

I would like to prevent you from having the kind of conversation I dread.

Archetypes and Prototypes

In between the straight arrow students and those who are wandering in a fog of avoidance and denial are the students who have chosen a future career based on incomplete information or misinformation. Where do misguided ambitions come from?

I have come to the conclusion that students often choose a career based on archetypes. Archetypes are prototypes, or the typical form something takes. Archetypes were described by Plato as containing the essence of something (“guitarness”) as opposed to being a specific instance of something (this guitar), and led to the concept of the “Platonic ideal.”⁵ For example, when I was shopping for an electric guitar, I was so picky that my friend accused me of searching for the Platonic ideal of a guitar. He suggested that most musicians enjoy the instrument they actually have and use, so I should just choose one and get on with it.

Applied to career choices, I believe that students initially choose from a narrow range of options that are essentially archetypes, which could be considered prototypes or stereotypes of available careers.⁶ When students initially choose, they’re thinking about prototypical careers like psychologist or teacher or counselor. Sometimes they are choosing a career based on what they have seen on TV, like criminal profiler. There is nothing horribly wrong about this, as students aspire to prestigious careers they already know.

Careers Don’t Turn Out Like the Archetypes

However, when you graduate from high school, your breadth of information about possible careers is so narrow that it’s like trying to pick a house to live in for the rest of your life from the houses for sale in your own neighborhood. The world is so big, but the neighborhood you grew up in was so small. You will not know where you want to live until you get out and see the world. The same logic applies to careers and graduate school: you don’t know the options without exploring.

In addition to picking from a small number of prototypes, there’s also a tremendous amount of pressure from peers, educators, and parents to know “what you want to do when you grow up.” As people cross the high school graduation stage and receive their diploma, they are supposed to know how they are going to spend the next several decades of their life.

In my view, your initial guesses about your career don’t matter much, because you are probably wrong. You should keep your options open. Many of the careers based on archetypes are extremely competitive and hard to achieve unless you are a “top scholar.” Furthermore, once you actually get there, often the job is not at all what you wanted or expected. For example, from time to time I hear about education majors who complete student teaching in their final semester only to learn that they cannot stand junior high students so their new teaching credential will not be helpful at all. Once I shared this example with some parents who were visiting the university with their son, who was considering the psychology major. They confessed that their eldest daughter just went through this experience. Uh oh. Didn’t mean to stumble into that awkward silence. They were trying to convince her to at least finish her education degree. I had some suggestions about how students can pivot in a new direction, and they left encouraged.

I want you to be encouraged as well. When you started college, picking the correct career is nearly impossible and probably based on the pressure to decide combined with a relatively small number of options derived from archetypes or prototypes. It is like trying to pick the house you'll live in for the rest of your life based only on your knowledge of your own neighborhood or a map of the world, without ever having traveled to see the place for yourself or spoken to locals who know the neighborhood. Don't despair. That's where everyone started, and the journey through the undergraduate years is supposed to give you the opportunity to broaden your perspective regarding what careers are available and attainable.

We Have to Do Better

I believe that students deserve better from higher education. I believe that everyone who can complete college should be well-informed about how careers and graduate school actually work. There's really no one to blame for the failure of colleges and universities to assign you a career because as you will see, the problem is that students, faculty, and staff can't predict the future and don't know every possible career.

No one can tell the future, and no one can understand the whole landscape of graduate school and careers. Each of us only knows our current point in time, our history, and our little corner of the world. For example, the World Wide Web was invented in 1990, while I was in college.⁷ There was no way that I could have anticipated all of the careers in software and internet commerce that have exploded into existence in the last 30 years. There was no Facebook, Google, or Amazon. Apple didn't make phones. Cellphones were science fiction, as Captain Kirk had that communicator in Star Trek.⁸ There were no smartphones. I didn't see any of that coming.

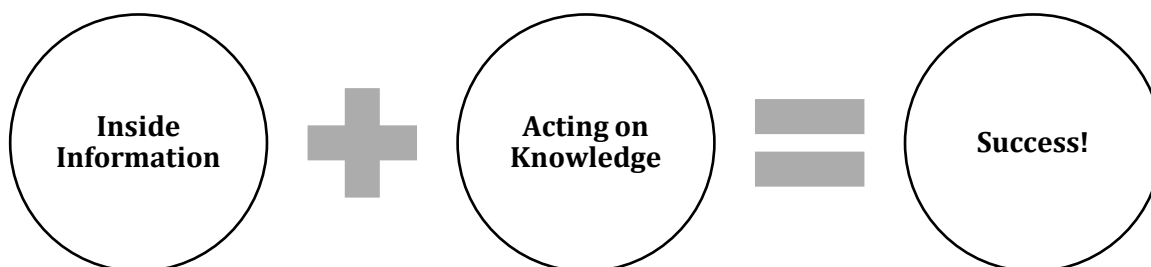
So instead of complaining, let's accept that no one is "all knowing" when it comes to careers and graduate programs, and instead adopt the attitude that each of us has to chart our own course based on general principles and strategies that will provide each of us with the knowledge and skills to succeed at our personal career goals. Careers and graduate programs have to be personalized to the specific person, and no one can make our choices for us. This is *your career path*, and the role of advisors such as myself is to tell you what it's like a little further down the road.

Pathways in Psychology

The purpose of this workbook is to tell you everything I have learned over the years about how to find a career and/or how to get into graduate school. Here it is—here is the answer—success depends on getting quality *inside information* from the "locals" who are already working there, and then *acting* on this information from your "informants." To put it in a picture (see **Figure**

1), inside information + acting on knowledge = success. We can abbreviate that as *informed action leads to success*.

Figure 1: The Success Formula



Pathway Metaphors

Throughout this book, I will use a metaphor to illustrate and unpack what it means to get the inside information you need to succeed. The title of the book and accompanying courses is “Pathways.” This emphasizes that your route to the future is a journey, with all that implies. Yeah, that’s a corny overused metaphor, but bear with me. You started in a particular location, with deep knowledge of your own neighborhood.

You arrived at college to expand your horizons, and there are many choice-points along the way. You chose a major based on your best understanding of educational opportunities at the time, and you chose a future career based on talking to people, observing society, and gathering information from sources like the internet, brochures, and catalogs. This is like looking at a map and picking a place to settle down. There is nothing wrong with maps—they summarize overly detailed information very efficiently and convey useful facts (e.g., the location of water, terrain, population estimates). However, without actually visiting the locations on the map or talking to local residents from those locations, you are throwing darts blindfolded when you choose a career. You would never buy a house off the internet in another state without having seen the neighborhood. Trust me. Professors move around a lot to finish their education and land a faculty job. My wife and I chose the house in which I am writing this book only after talking to locals about the communities around Kent State University followed by rushing around with a real estate agent to look at 15+ houses during a one-weekend visit. I would not still be living at this address if it was a bad decision.

The implications of the map and pathways metaphors also explain why most students who have an indirect route to their career or graduate school eventually succeed. I have watched hundreds of undergraduate psychology majors graduate and go on to great careers and graduate programs, and the story is nearly always the same. They met with advisors. They *honestly* evaluated their chances. When they encountered a roadblock, they knew how to adjust course and keep moving forward. They sought out informational interviews and packed their bags with internships and research experiences. They may have softly cried in my office when they realized that their premed dream was not going to work out (damn Organic Chemistry 2!), but later they were beaming when they told me about the job offers they received or the graduate programs to which they were accepted.

The implications of the map metaphor also explain why some students travel directly to their chosen destination with no detours. The difference-maker is usually inside information. For example, when I get an email from high school student Phillip who wants to be a pediatrician, I don't believe him. Unless Phil knows a pediatrician. If I come to learn that Phillip has a family friend who practices pediatrics at a local hospital, and that Phil was volunteering at the hospital in high school, and has a 90th percentile college entrance exam score (SAT® or ACT®),⁹ and is emailing to ask about the premed concentration in the Bachelor of Science so he can discuss course selections with his Honors' College advisor, then I suddenly have great confidence that Phillip may indeed become a pediatrician. On the other hand, if Phil just picked "pediatrician" based on reruns of some doctor show on TV, then I am not at all confident in his prediction.

Start to conceptualize your pathway in psychology as a journey to a new location. The implications help explain what your priorities should be. Priorities include carefully examining the "map" to get as prepared as possible, having a route mapped out that actually leads to your destination, getting inside information from *locals* (not tourists), visiting first before you buy, having backup plans if roadblocks prevent your progress, having enough self-awareness to know whether or not you are well-suited to settle down at the destination you chose, and taking action when your informants give you the scoop on what will work.

A critically important message from the map metaphor is that you can succeed—but not necessarily at what you originally set out to do.

Olivia

If you'll allow me to digress to tell you an encouraging story that illustrates this point, meet Olivia (all names have been changed). Olivia took the Career Pathways in Psychology course in 2016, and then met with me for faculty advising. She had a double major in Psychology and Political Science, with a desire to pursue a career in political science (the details were fuzzy). From Career Pathways and our advising meeting, she learned about the importance of internships, and I made random suggestions for potential internship sites ("maybe find the local politicians where you live...offer to be their unpaid intern"). She completed an internship with a local politician (apparently they love free labor) and came back for another meeting to discuss her plans for a PhD in political science. She was not admitted to the Ivy-league school to which she applied but graduated and decided to move the state where she wanted to live. She applied to five more masters'-level programs, using the strength of her internship, personal statement, and grades to bolster her application. She recently emailed me to report that she started a master's degree in International Studies at a fantastic state university in the fall of 2018. She later emailed me to say that she found an affordable apartment within walking distance of the university, accepted a graduate assistantship that will cover part of her tuition, and landed a summer job. Now she's ecstatic about her new life in a much warmer state than Ohio.

This was all Olivia's fault. All I did to help was meet with her a few times and give her some suggestions. Olivia found her internship, chose her list of graduate programs, wrote her personal statement (and listened to feedback), and did everything else that contributed to her success.

Yes, you can succeed.

Why Listen to Me?

When I went to college before you were born, I did well in school, and I was relatively involved in my department. I had the grades. I had the Graduate Record Examinations (GRE®)¹⁰ scores. I thought I was doing everything right. I was determined to go to graduate school and become a clinical psychologist. Unfortunately, no one really advised me on how that would work, so I did not get into a PhD program for two years. I had several fatal flaws that I did not understand at the time. For example, I did not have enough research experience to be competitive for a PhD program. Also, I only applied to three programs. Finally, I was socially awkward and too weird to pass the audition at the one interview that I did land. The second year I applied and was not admitted to any PhD programs, I was admitted to three masters-level programs in clinical psychology. (I had developed a backup strategy!) At the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, I learned about all my misconceptions and misunderstandings. My peers set me straight. After two years getting a master's degree, my GRE score went up substantially (I learned to prepare correctly), I had real research experience, and I understood that I needed to apply to at least 10 PhD programs. I had networked at conferences. I had honed my personal statement and interests. I had even switched sub-disciplines, from neuropsychology to health psychology. Then, I was admitted to several PhD programs and chose to attend The Ohio State University. I was still too weird, but somehow I passed the interview weekend. I'm probably still too weird...whatever.

I have been at Kent State University since 2003. At one point, I was the director of graduate admissions for our PhD programs in Psychological Science and Clinical Science, so I've read thousands of personal statements, curriculum vitae's (CV's—see **Chapter 9**), and letters of recommendation. After that, I was the director of the Applied Psychology Center, which is a research center in our department that supports faculty and graduate student research. I then transitioned into the role of Undergraduate Curriculum Coordinator. This title means that I was responsible for the undergraduate educational experience in the Department of Psychological Sciences. This includes the curriculum (e.g., creating new courses and new concentrations), course exception decisions (e.g., transfer credits), Departmental Advising, admissions events, and so on. This was when I started to have more and more of the same conversation with students about careers and plans for graduate school.

In my five years as Undergraduate Curriculum Coordinator, we *transformed* the undergraduate experience in the Department. When I started, the Bachelor of Science was brand new (we have had a Bachelor of Arts for 100 years). To our two undergraduate degrees, we added several concentrations (e.g., pre-medicine/pre-osteopathy, child psychology, counseling careers). We developed a Career Pathways in Psychology course because the Department of Biological Sciences had one (we're not above imitation, the sincerest form of flattery). We hired Professional Advisors in our department to provide in-house advising. We renovated the Advising offices to create an Advising Suite in the main office of the Department. We created new undergraduate study spaces. We greatly increased the number of internships in the department and continued to encourage widespread participation in faculty research laboratories. We expanded opportunities for study abroad including a new Destination Florence (Italy) program. We created the Psychology Scholars Program and the Peer Mentor Program. The students resurrected the local chapter of Psi Chi, the International Honor Society in Psychology,¹¹ from a low-participation huddle into a large vibrant and active honors' society.

Evidence of our students' success was everywhere. For example, we were awarding more and more undergraduate awards (e.g., the Outstanding Senior Awards, Outstanding Junior Awards, and the Dr. F Robert and Nancy Treichler Psychology Scholarships). These are in addition to other awards given by the College of Arts and Sciences and the university, such as multiple Distinguished Student Leader Awards. For several years running, we have had a large number of posters at the university-wide Undergraduate Research Day. I keep hearing stories of students accepting offers of admission to graduate school or beginning exciting careers. We have seen the undergraduate students' morale in the department flourish with our reforms.

I keep saying "we" because I was only executing the vision of my Department Chair (Dr. Maria Zaragoza), with whom many of the ideas for these improvements originated. The renaissance in the undergraduate psychology major was also due to our stellar psychology students, our tireless advisors, the service of the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee, the efforts of our active engaged faculty, the guidance of the Dean for Curriculum in the College of Arts and Sciences (Dr. Mary Ann Haley), and the leadership of the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences (Dr. James Blank).

As I write this workbook, I am transitioning to a new role in the department: Director of Clinical Training (overseeing our APA-accredited PhD program in clinical psychology). All this is to say that *I know what I'm talking about* when it comes to succeeding as a psychology major. I also *know what I don't know*, which is nearly as important. As an aside, embrace your ignorance: I do. Recognizing that you need more information is the right place to start.

As a final parting contribution, before my attention is fully consumed by my new role in the department, I decided to revise the *Career Pathways in Psychology* course and develop a new curriculum that covers getting into graduate school in more depth. *Career Pathways in Psychology* is a one-credit distance learning course open to as many Kent State University students as possible, and the goal is to provide a thorough, practical body of knowledge on how careers and admission to graduate school actually work for students who finish a bachelor's degree in psychology. It's a "choose your own adventure" course in which everyone completes **Section 1** and then decides whether to continue with **Section 2** (Graduate School) or **Section 3** (Careers). Everyone gets the bonus material in the **Appendices**.

To make the course coherent, I decided to author a workbook that covers all three sections. One problem we have had in the past is that students who are finished with *Career Pathways* may not have needed to start their career or submit their applications to graduate school for a year or two, at which point they no longer have access to the information on the course management website anymore. A workbook solves the problem. This workbook will be the text for the *Career Pathways* course. However, I am also committed to making it widely available to all psychology majors everywhere, in hopes that I can be of some assistance to the hundreds of thousands of undergraduate students who choose what is one of the most popular majors at most colleges and universities. If your university doesn't have a *Career Pathways* course, maybe I'll build an online not-for-credit course eventually—check <http://www.PsychPathways.com>. To do that, there would have to be enough interest.

The Meaning in a Memoir

I intentionally include a lot of my own journey in this book. The rationale is based on an observation by Admiral James Stavridis and his co-author, R. Manning Ancell in their recent book *The Leaders Bookshelf*.¹² They surveyed hundreds of military leaders and enlisted personnel regarding their favorite books because apparently, the military has a strong tradition of reading. What they discovered was that the top book for both groups was a work of fiction; *The Killer Angels*.¹³ Also, autobiographies were often highly cited as being influential, such as the Memoir of Ulysses S. Grant.¹⁴ Apparently, we learn as much from fiction and autobiography as we do from the nonfiction self-help books that you might expect leaders to be reading (e.g., *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*).¹⁵ The concrete narratives recorded in fiction and memoirs illustrate abstract concepts in ways that really resonate with readers. So it is without apology that I reveal my meandering career path in this book. I cannot even anticipate what you may learn from my story or the anecdotes I share about real students with whom I have worked, as my insight is limited compared to your outside perspective. So, there is value in offering parts of my story for your consideration.

Of course, one of the embarrassing aspects of telling my story is that my flaws and ignorance will be apparent, which should serve as a warning.

You should not believe 1/4 of what I say.

Unfortunately, I do not know which 1/4 of my opinions are false. I certainly don't know everything, and my perspective is as limited as anyone. In my little corner of the university (clinical psychology, health psychology, cardiovascular psychophysiology, cardiovascular behavioral medicine), I have deep knowledge and can give sophisticated advice. In adjacent territories (public health, medicine, biology, counseling, education) I know enough to be dangerous and can be useful to students interested in these fields. As you get further away from my sphere of influence, I know a lot less. If you ask me about careers in English or computer science, I am far less aware of opportunities. This is one reason why you ought not to blame your professors, friends, or parents for their sincere input. Nobody knows everything. This is also why professors will give conflicting advice. If you ask three psychologists their opinion or advice about your personal statement, choice of graduate programs, or how to study for entrance exams, you'll probably get seven different answers!

Ultimately, this is *your path* to walk, so you have to use your noodle and get inside information from locals.

How to Use This Book

This is a workbook. Even if you are reading this on an e-reader (e.g., Kindle) or taking the accompanying distance learning classes, you should use physical pieces of paper as worksheets to actually write out your answers to the prompts. Writing requires more mental processing than typing, which results in better learning. In the class, the online quizzes are for other purposes, but anything that is critical for you to process deeply must be written long-hand instead of typed into a website submission box. Growing evidence suggests that taking notes by hand is better than taking notes on a computer.¹⁶ For example, a recent study was conducted at a United States Military Academy comparing taking notes on a laptop computer to taking notes on paper.¹⁷ Students required to take notes on paper had higher exam scores than those who

were allowed to use computers, even if the computers were locked-down to only run a word processor. I have recently transitioned from my digital to-do lists to a paper planner, and it has really helped me stay focused and productive (see **Appendix C**). Also, the point of this workbook is to provide you with a lasting record of your planning, which can serve as a reference in the future. Of course, not every chapter or topic will be equally interesting or relevant to your situation, so you should practice the art of *not* finishing books that aren't helping. Use the chapters that you need, and ignore the rest. You can download a clean copy of the worksheets at www.psychpathways.com, which is especially important if you're reading an eBook (worksheets don't format well in eBooks).

This Book is Only ONE Informant

Of course, it goes without saying that this book cannot replace professional advising, faculty advising, or input from your peers. This book is only one informant. You also need inside information from your professional advisor about the correct courses to take to complete your degree, the kinds of experience that can be found where you are enrolled, and practical advice about paperwork like your resume and cover letter. You also need a faculty advisor. For example, this book does not replace having a member of the faculty review your personal statement. Later you will see that *you should never send out a personal statement that has not been read by a member of the faculty closely aligned with the graduate program to which you are applying*. For example, if you are applying to medical school, you really need to have the faculty on the premed committee read your personal statement and give you some feedback. If you're applying to a master's degree program in social work, ideally you need both a social worker and a member of the faculty to read your personal statement. This is one of the biggest mistakes students make with application materials: *overreliance on the wrong informants*. For example, your roommate and your mom are not the right people to review your resume unless they are deeply connected in the field you're trying to break into.

What This Book is NOT About

This book follows the maxim of "principles over particulars," which here means that I will not be covering long lists of possible careers or graduate programs. This book is not a catalog. There are already catalogs, like the *Graduate Study in Psychology*¹⁸ reference book published annually by the American Psychological Association (APA).¹⁹ There is also an edited volume describing dozens of careers available to psychologists.²⁰ There are websites for exploring possible careers, which are constantly evolving.⁵ Any workbook focused on lists of programs and careers would be immediately out of date.

This approach may seem counter-intuitive, as many career exploration programs involve exposing students to as many specific opportunities as possible. However, my goal is to provide an *overall approach* that will apply broadly to various career pathways and fields of graduate study, because that is consistent with my thesis that you must get inside information on each specific career or graduate program that interests you. In **Appendix A**, I list some resources for further study.

Get Started

To get started, there are three worksheets for the first chapter. They all involve some reflection and planning. For the first, take some time to consider your goals for this book or class. What is

it that you want to know when you are done? For the second, take some time to list all the questions you can think of that you need to have answered for your specific situation. As you progress through the book (or course), look for the answers to these questions. If you still have questions when you're done, perhaps you will find the answers in the recommended readings or by talking with your professional advisor, faculty advisor, or peers. Finally, the last worksheet has some hints on how to use this book. From the field of psychology, we know that stating an intention with a specific plan is a powerful way to ensure that you take action. So, for example, there is a place to write down when you intend to read the next chapter.

Assignments

Complete the following worksheets:

- Worksheet 1.1: My Goals for This Class
- Worksheet 1.2: My Questions That Need to be Answered
- Worksheet 1.3: How to Use This Book

Your new motto: **“Informed action leads to success.”**

Worksheet 1.1: My Goals for This Book or Class

Take some time to consider your goals for this book or class. What is it that you want to know when you are done? How will you know that you succeeded? For now don't worry about making specific, measurable, action-oriented goals with deadlines. Just list your goals as raw as they come out of your head.

My Goals are:

Worksheet 1.2: My Questions That Need Answered

Take some time to list the questions that you need answered for your specific situation. As you progress through the book (or course), look for the answers to these questions. When you think of more questions, record them here or use extra paper if necessary. Check them off when they are answered, and perhaps make a notation of where you found the answer.

Answered	My Questions

Worksheet 1.3: How to Use This Workbook

Think about this workbook as a lasting record that you can use as a reference when you are ready to apply to graduate school or find a job. The margins are wide—write in them! If you’re reading this on an e-reader, get some actual pieces of paper to use as worksheets (they don’t translate to eBooks very well) and a good pen or pencil. Create your own notebook or folder of materials.

Commit to filling out all the worksheets that apply to you, but ignore chapters and worksheets that you don’t need. Physically writing out your answers helps you to process and remember the key points and action items, so this workbook cannot be completed online. If you use a computer to create digital versions of your planning documents, use the workbook first to firmly fix things in your mind. For example, you might write the file names of the documents you create and where they are located (e.g., “Psychology Programs.xls” in the “Applications for 2019 folder,” or “Personal Statement Draft.docx”).

Furthermore, use whatever systems you want to organize your campaign for admission to graduate school or to launch your career. Any organizational system you actually use is better than one that you don’t use.

Finally, the research shows that your odds of following through on your intentions are increased by writing down a day and time that you will do the next tasks. This is called an “implementation intention.”²¹ So make an appointment with yourself for when you will read the next chapter, fill out worksheets, surf the web for information, or complete your next action items.

When I will read the next chapter: _____

Action items: Next steps	Date and time

“My fear is that these kids are always going to be evaluating their self-worth in terms of whether they hit the next rung society has placed in front of them at exactly the time that society has placed it. And that’s dangerous, because you’re going to slip and fall in your life.”
(Frank Bruni, 2015)²²

Chapter 2

Pitfalls of Predicting. Or, What You Don’t Know *Can* Hurt Your Career.

Agenda for Chapter 2:

- To pose the question of “What is college actually for?”
- To give one answer to this question.
- To understand what problems limit people’s success.
- To suggest that *ignorance* of the typical path to a career or graduate school causes problems.
- To give you a tactical advantage: “forewarned is forearmed.”

Fall Freshman

Fall is still my favorite time of year, and not just because of football or changing leaf colors or cooler temperatures. Every August or September, each new high school graduate of sufficient means and ability begins a transition from childhood to adulthood.

Students start or return to college every fall. It is a glorious time. For two weeks, there’s no parking and a lot of extra traffic. This is because everyone thinks they’re going to go to every class every day, which is not true. After a couple of weeks, the traffic subsides, and the parking becomes less crowded.

The university is particularly welcoming to new students, hosting at least a weekend of what I call “camp” with a packed schedule of parties, fireworks, mandatory lectures and summer reading assignment discussions, welcoming receptions with college deans, the convocation pep rally, and planned excursions to explore the downtown.

What is college for?

Every fall I ponder the meaning of it all. What is college for? There seem to be three²³ answers:

Get a job. Starting with initial campus tours by high school juniors in the spring of every year, continuing through the application and courtship process to the declaration of a major (or the declaration of undecided status) and the scheduling of the first semester of classes, for most people a major focus of college is getting a job. Parents want to know what kinds of careers are available to students choosing various majors, and there are websites ranking majors and universities by the earning power of new graduates. New college students, I fear, are unprepared to declare allegiance to a lifelong calling. This is evident from the major changes that the collective imagination claims occur an average of three to four times per student. As I suggested in **Chapter 1**, picking a career at 18 is like playing darts blindfolded. You may not even hit the board. And yet, about 70% of Americans believe that preparing for a specific job is the primary purpose of going to college.²⁴

Well, I'm not anti-job, and I am spending a lot of time on this workbook and course about career pathways and graduate school options. Unfortunately, college is not designed to help you get a specific job. Even majors that appear to be a "conveyor belt" like engineering do not guarantee you a career as an engineer. For example, only about 1 in 4 graduates of Stanford are employed in a career related to their college major.²⁵ Let that sink in: 1 in 4! Usually, your course of study in college does not lead to a specific occupation or graduate program. Although you *will* start a career or continue for an advanced degree, the purpose of college is broader than job training.

Furthermore, when students graduate, they often find that life is not principally about their job. Or at least it shouldn't be. Your job is what you have to do to pay for your life, and if you're lucky, it has meaning and purpose that make it satisfying. A lot of life takes place somewhere else, and a lot of people hate their job. Or perhaps your job *is* your life, in which case I feel sad for you. I had a doctor once who retired but was back at work after only a few months because he had nothing else to do. He was going to run out the clock seeing patients because there was no greater purpose to his life, and he had quickly gotten bored with playing golf and reading. He certainly didn't want to hang out with his wife all day every day! I felt sorry for him. When I retire someday, you won't be able to find me at the university, because I'll have other things to do.

"Rite of passage" into adulthood. All the movies about college seem to be about this alleged purpose of the college experience—*Animal House*,²⁶ *Revenge of the Nerds*,²⁷ etc. (I know I'm dating myself). The plot is always the same. Jenny and Biff come to school naïve and awkward, but in their hilarious hijinks with their friends and their rivalry with the uptight Dean Spiffler, they really *find* themselves...although in the movies what they often find themselves is drunk and laid. Yes, the "rite of passage" seems to involve a lot of drinking and chasing tail. If I sound crass, consider the burgeoning literature on "hookup culture"²⁸ and calm down.

Universities often support this purpose of college, if unintentionally. The themes of the initial campus visit appear to be the joys of mandatory residence in expensive campus dorms, the cornucopia of culinary choices, the extensive student organizations for every interest no matter how niche, the nonstop sports and recreation activities, and every other kind of fun that can be found at the stationary cruise ship that residential campuses have become.

Did you hear that the presidents of some colleges want to lower the drinking age? For years, former Middlebury College President John McCardell has been criticizing the 21-year-old-drinking age.²⁹ About 100 of the nation's best-known institutions once signed on to McCardell's "Amethyst Initiative," named for the Greek gemstone said to ward off intoxication. I imagine students explaining this to the police, "It's OK occiffer, I got an amethyst necklace, so I not krunked at all." Supporters included presidents of private universities such as Duke, Dartmouth, and Johns Hopkins, and public schools including THE Ohio State University and the University of Maryland.

They alleged that current laws actually encourage dangerous binge drinking on campus. More than 40 percent of college students report at least one symptom of alcohol abuse or dependence. More than 500,000 full-time students at four-year colleges suffer injuries each year related in some way to drinking, and about 1,800 die in such accidents.³⁰ Maybe the Amethyst Initiative is the way to go, but I haven't heard about it lately. Maybe that's because alcohol-related problems were way down after the national drinking age was raised to 21, so apparently, the current laws don't encourage binge drinking as much as people thought.

Well, I'm not against rites of passage, but again, how this is lived out can be problematic. A lot of new students try to "have fun but not too much fun" to avoid traps like "baby changes everything."^{31,32} When you graduate, you find out that the fun didn't last that long, and that you have a lot of life left that will be really boring if college partying was the "good old days." The sobering fact that life continues after graduation is one of the concluding points in *I am Charlotte Simmons*,³³ Tom Wolfe's fictional exposé of college life. Seriously, we laugh at people who peaked in high school. Why peak in college? Isn't there anything to look forward to?

Learn critical thinking. If you're not looking for a "rite of passage" in college, there's always developing critical thinking or "becoming consumers of knowledge" and "lifelong learners." There's also learning to "appreciate diversity in a pluralistic society" or some other abstract, idealistic thoughts. This is what the university administrators might say, and this sloganeering fills admissions brochures like graffiti sprayed in by outsourced marketing and public relations firms.

The university mission statement is probably something like this:

"At the University of State, our success is measured not by who we exclude, but rather by who we include in our mission to develop engaged change-leaders and idea-thinkers who pursue transformative discoveries and artistic pieces or experiences benefitting the public good by assuming major responsibility for the economic, social and cultural vitality, along with the health, well-being, flourishing, and tolerance and liberty and justice for all of our global community and sustainably sustained environment."

Just pack it all in until every stakeholder feels heard, but it doesn't mean anything. That's just a goody-goody kid answer that might make you feel better about yourself, but it's not what's going to happen at college.

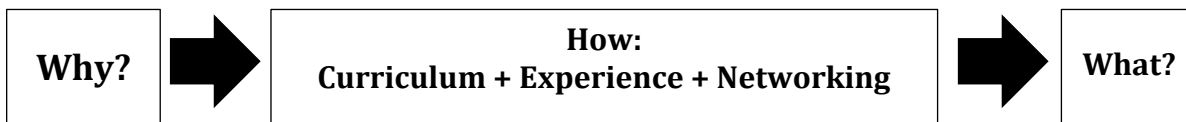
So What is College For?

One of the problems of these three answers to the purpose of education is that they aren't really the "why?" The "why" of a college education is deeper than a job, fun, or developing critical thinking skills. When this was written, the third most popular TED Talk of all time was "How great leaders inspire action" in which Simon Sinek argues that great leaders succeed in the face of adversity by starting with "why," firmly rooting the "how" and "what" in the *purpose* of their organization or cause.^{34,35} This idea resonates with everyone. There are subtitles to this TED Talk for 47 languages. Approaching higher education with the "why" firmly in your mind can help motivate and focus your adventure through the college years. In the first chapter, I introduced the pathway metaphor to emphasize that you're on a journey through college to a destination beyond, and getting clear about why you're traveling helps motivate and focus both your activities during college and your ability to read the map in search of quality destinations.

The "How," the "What," and the "Why" of College

In my view, the main purpose of college is to help you find your "why," and then supply the "how" that leads to a "what." In other words, you refine your purpose and the meaningful contributions you want to accomplish in your future career ("why"), and then you acquire the learning, credentials, experience, and social capital ("how") to get you to a career destination ("what") that will support your purpose. I've depicted this in **Figure 2**. Let's break it down.

Figure 2: The Purpose of College



What. The "what" refers to your *current* situation and your *future* destination: your major, your job, your career, your graduate program, or whatever the next step is after college. What are you doing? What do you want to do? Most students stress out about figuring out "what" they are supposed to do, not realizing that your preferences will evolve as you explore and gain knowledge and experience. People ask, "What is your major?" They're being polite, but it's the wrong question. Stay flexible with your "what." That comes eventually, and later chapters will show you how to explore and make informed choices.

For example, changes in preference can happen rapidly. I often meet with a student who declares their intention to pursue a PhD in clinical psychology. Within a half hour, they have often changed their plans to something else, like a doctoral degree in public health, or a master's degree in a counseling field, or even a career in nonprofit management. Their best guess of what they wanted to do was not as important as their motive for graduate study. Once they started to consider some of the implications of their choice (e.g., too research focused?), they often become very flexible about their choice of graduate program to preserve their more closely held values that reflect the reasons behind their choices. In other words, the "why" trumps the "what."

How. The "how" of college is the means to that end and comprises the bulk of what you will do in college. This includes all of the academic programs of the university; majors, minors, credentials, etc. This is how universities are organized structurally. To this, you add the

experiential learning available at the university, in the form of internships, research, service learning, and so on. Unsuccessful students neglect experience because it's not "required" for graduation. Big mistake. More on that in later chapters. Think about it: you can't be an electrician without having apprenticed yourself to another electrician and wired some bathrooms and kitchens. Ignoring experiential learning is like studying the map for hours (class) but never traveling to any destination on the map (experience). Later chapters will have a lot to say about the importance of gaining valuable experience in college.

In addition to the curriculum and experience, college is for networking. For many students, networking is a stinky word that doesn't sound fun, but all it means is building your social capital. Networking has such a bad rap that, in **Chapter 17**, I made up a new and sillier phrase just to try to dislodge negative connotations from the reader's mind.

Networking could include everyone you meet, such as roommates, students, professors, coworkers, bosses, etc. Again, most students ignore networking and build very little social capital. Big mistake. Who will write your letters of recommendation? I am astonished at the number of students I meet who do not know who their faculty advisor is, or that they have one. These students are lost on some path in the woods that does not lead to where they claim they are going.

Collectively, curriculum, experience, and social capital provide an environment in which you develop your interests and skills until you have what it takes to land the career you've always wanted or get into the right graduate program for you. Most of your time in college is spent building an impressive resume and honing a high level of expertise in valuable skills like writing, public speaking, problem-solving, data analysis, and so on. But, all the building is motivated by the "why."

Why. The "Why" is to define and refine your purpose, and the next chapter will be all about finding your purpose.³⁶ Yes, I'm waxing philosophical, but it's necessary. Remember the map, path, and destination metaphors. Your destination is not really a precise location (e.g., job) but rather an environment that supports your purpose.

Does the precise geographic location of your house matter as much as how well your home supports the life you want to live? If the purpose of your house is to support your desire to spend a lot of time hiking in the mountains, does it matter what street you pick so long as you live somewhere safe and affordable with good employment opportunities and easy access to hundreds of miles of mountain trails? If the purpose of your career is to improve the mental health and wellbeing of children, does it matter whether you're a pediatric nurse, child advocate, or school psychologist? You can serve your purpose with a variety of jobs and careers. Finding your "why" takes your eyes off the map and underscores the importance of finding quality inside information on which you can act to try out different ways of fulfilling your purpose.

If this sounds like a cop-out, consider that we don't usually know why we chose the options we did. When you end up in a career, you'll make up a reason for why you chose that job without even knowing that you were "choice blind."³⁷ If you don't believe me, check out the TED talk by Petter Johansson here:³⁸

https://www.ted.com/talks/petter_johansson_do_you_really_know_why_you_do_what_you_do

Therefore, finding your purpose precedes choosing your specific career or graduate program, which avoids a lot of heartache and disappointment. Finding your purpose also fuels success by bolstering motivation and fighting the listless apathy and anxious avoidance that causes many students to simply drift along, going nowhere. Before you turn to **Chapter 3**, we must first consider some dead ends along the way that trap a lot of students.

Failing at life. In my typical sardonic style, I cruelly mock some people's sorry state by declaring that they're "failing at life." It's disrespectful, I know. The point of my sarcastic attempt at humor is to declare that *college is real life*, and that "tough love" involves drawing attention to choices that are not conducive to success in college or beyond. It's sad but true: many students do not succeed. What's the 6-year graduation rate at your university? You don't get into graduate school without at least a bachelor's degree, and many careers require an education and/or credential.³⁹

In addition to failing to graduate, many college graduates end up under-employed. They include those that work in the same retail or food service job they held during college. I meet some of them who graduated from my own department, and I hope they can get back on track and move on to something closer to what they had aspired to. Unfortunately, under-employment can become a permanent detour on a worse pathway! A recent report on the future of work analyzed over 4 million resumes to determine whether graduate's first jobs required a bachelor's degree.⁴⁰ Fully 43% of the sample was under-employed in their first job, and the effects often lasted up to 5 and 10 years.

Therefore, taking *informed action* is critical to both getting through college and making sure that you launch your career correctly, which here means by getting a job that at least requires a degree. What is far too common among college students is wandering into a dead end through poor life choices or bad luck.

Avoid dead ends. Sociologist Christian Smith has written about some of the other problems that derail student's success.⁴¹ These include *untreated* mental health problems such as loneliness, anxiety, depression, and substance abuse, failing out of school, "baby changes everything," and running out of money. I have known *many* students who end up on academic probation at the end of the first or second semester, and this can be a career-killer. Typically the problem is that they have no idea how to study, get organized, and manage their life. See **Appendix B** and **Appendix C** for my crash-course in these areas. I have also known many students who are caught in other traps Christian Smith described. For example, two women of very similar academic ability took my First Year Experience course. They both wanted to be a child psychologist. They both had the potential. They both met with me for faculty advising. Fast forward about 5 years. One is in a graduate program in child clinical psychology. The other was already pregnant when she got to college but didn't know until Thanksgiving break. Over Christmas break, she moved back home, and I don't know what happened to her. Maybe she graduated from college, but she is probably not in graduate school.

Get help. If you run into problems such as financial difficulty, mental or physical health concerns, or substance abuse, get help! It's not unusual. For example, about 40% of college students have a "mental disorder" if you combine alcohol and substance abuse, depression and anxiety, and other diagnoses like attention deficit disorder. An additional percentage have

health problems, and college is when many people transition from having their chronic condition (e.g., diabetes, lupus) managed by their parents to self-management of their health. There's no shame in having problems. Everyone has problems. By the time you're my age, you'll have a palm full of daily pills to take (if you don't already!). The difference between success and failure is often getting help, so humble yourself and overcome your challenges with assistance. If your problems are too big to allow college, that's not the end of the world. Get some advice and figure out if you can continue or if you need to take a break and regroup. I've helped some students put their lives back together after failing out, and sometimes they just needed to work for a while and learn some life skills before they re-enroll at college. I've also been there. I almost dropped out of college between my first and second year because I didn't have the down payment for my tuition. After talking to some people, the consensus was that I should just drive the 900 miles to Southern California and show up for registration. Maybe they would let me start classes. They did.

Various college-interfering life problems are so common that most students have at least one. Solving them all is beyond the scope of this workbook, but for now, you can read the chapter on resilience and make a plan for addressing your situation instead of avoiding dealing with it. One of the worksheets for this week involves listing the success-limiting risks and vulnerabilities you face so that you can at least be aware of what problems you need to solve.

Overcome ignorance. One of the problems that is easy to miss is *ignorance* of the way careers and graduate school actually work. This issue afflicts us all, to various degrees, but take heart! The purpose of college is to start to reflect on your “why” (your purpose) so that you can be prepared to take action on your “what” (degree program, experience, skill acquisition, etc.). To borrow another Frank Bruni quote:

“College is a singular opportunity to rummage through and luxuriate in ideas, to give your brain a vigorous workout and your soul a thorough investigation, to realize how very large the world is and to contemplate your desired place in it.”¹⁹

In the next chapter, we'll expand on the critical role of *purpose* in guiding you down the path to your future career.

Assignments

Complete the following worksheets:

- Worksheet 2.1: My Risks and Vulnerabilities.
- Worksheet 2.2: My Current “What” and “How.”

Your new perspective: **“I need to know what to do before I can figure out how to do it.”**

Worksheet 2.1: My Risks and Vulnerabilities

Take some time to consider any barriers and struggles you have that could limit your success or send you down a dead-end path. What is the next step you need to take to start addressing this problem?

My Risks:	My Next Steps:
I am prone to depression.	I am getting help at the counseling center, and will start exercising.
I already have a lot of student loans.	I'm trying not to change majors any more, and will avoid adding credit card debt..
My GPA is too low.	I will read Appendix B on how to study, and will actually do the things recommended.
I don't really know how to become a zoologist.	I need to find a zoologist to talk to about how this works.

Worksheet 2.2: My Current “What” and “How.”

Write down your *current* plans for your first post-college job or graduate program. Write down the action you are taking that corresponds to these plans. You will revisit this worksheet after reading **Chapter 3**.

My plans:	My corresponding activities: Curriculum, experience, and networking.
Neuroscientist.	Psychology major. Working in an animal research laboratory. Meeting with the graduate student who runs the lab.
Computer programmer.	Computer science minor. Learning programming languages. On-campus job in desktop computer support.
I have no idea what I want to do.	Majoring in Psychology. Need to find a research lab experience or internship opportunity. Need to find a faculty advisor. Need to join the peer mentor program and network with other students.

"One of the great lies of life is 'follow your passions.'"
- Mark Cuban⁴²

Chapter 3

Purpose over Passion. Or, You are the Master of Your Destiny, Sort of.

Agenda for Chapter 3:

- To argue that students should *not* “follow their dreams,” but should instead define their purpose, and use that to guide career choices.
- To show that converging lines of evidence from thought leaders and science agree that purpose trumps passion when it comes to launching a career.

Alexis was *mathematically eliminated* from becoming a pediatric nurse. I explained again, “even if you had 100 more credits of A’s, you would still not have the minimum GPA to even apply to the nursing program.” She started to cry. I probed. “Why do you want to be a pediatric nurse?” She responded, “Because I love babies and I want to help them!”

I can work with that.

Promoting the welfare of infants and children is a *purpose*, and there are a dozen ways to pursue that noble cause. Becoming a pediatric nurse is a *passion* or a dream job. Thankfully, it was easy for Alexis to articulate the motive for her dream of becoming a pediatric nurse, so even though that career had become impossible, she was easily persuaded that all hope was not lost. Her degree in psychology would still be valuable, especially if she broadened her horizons to consider the dozens of curricular and career options that would facilitate a future helping children.

I have had variations of this conversation dozens of times, as students discover that they are not suited for the career path they *initially* chose. Sometimes they are seniors with no experience or credentials to support their application to graduate school. Sometimes they want to be a clinician but have personal qualities that are likely to become a barrier (e.g., mild autism, untreated severe anxiety, schizophrenia). Sometimes their entrance exam scores are too low, or they can’t think of enough graduate schools to apply to. Sometimes they just don’t have the money or freedom to move to distant locations where their dream school or job is located (e.g., maybe they’re place-bound to care for an ailing parent).

In my experience, I have *always* been able to find a way to support someone's purpose, even while I am telling them their passion is out of reach.

Passion vs. Purpose

Here I am using these terms in a specific way; although in casual conversation people often use them nearly interchangeably. When I write *passion*, I mean your dream job, or a specific graduate degree, like PhD in clinical psychology. Many students want to be a physician, neuroscientist, and so on. These are very specific. As a metaphor, I often call this approach "I want to be an astronaut when I grow up." Sorry, there's no shuttle program, and you're not already a naval pilot. When I use the word *purpose*, I'm referring to the "why" introduced in **Chapter 2**, which includes all the motives, values, preferences, tastes, talents, and other reasons why a person has chosen a particular career path. The "future astronaut" is probably expressing a desire to explore, a willingness to face danger and uncertainty, and a drive to accomplish great and rare feats. That's fantastic! The world needs aspiring astronauts if they'll re-direct their efforts to something...on this planet.

You can always pursue your purpose, but usually, you cannot (or should not) follow your dreams. Yes, there are the rare students whose path is a straight line. Phillip from **Chapter 1** may very well become a pediatrician. However, the aspiring physician typically alters course along the way. Every biography of famous people describes twists and turns in their life. Therefore, we should prioritize *purpose over passion*.

I know this contradicts the conventional wisdom they taught you in grade school, which was that if you just believe in yourself and follow your dreams, you would be an astronaut or starting center for a professional basketball team one day. Nope.

Choose Purpose Over Passion

In the last chapter, I suggested the college experience is for defining and refining your "why," or your purpose. This is how great leaders lead, and you are the leader of your career ambitions. Over the last five years, I've encountered some sources that all converge on this critical distinction between purpose and passion. Should you follow your dreams? Probably not. Should you clearly articulate the purpose of your life? Absolutely.

Billionaire Mark Cuban, owner of the Dallas Mavericks' basketball team⁴³ and investor on the TV show *Shark Tank*,⁴⁴ argues that you should follow your *effort*. In his brief video on Amazon for the *Insights for Entrepreneurs* series, he suggests that whatever you'll try really hard at is something you'll become really good at, and that it's really fun to be very good at something. He said he had a passion for basketball, but he didn't have the talent ("7 inch vertical," he said). Well, now he owns a team. So he eventually found a way to indulge his passion, but not as a player. Is he right?

Insightful author Cal Newport also said that you should not follow your dreams in his book *So good they can't ignore you: Why skills trump passion in the quest for work you love*.⁴⁵ He expands his thesis in a book-length argument that career satisfaction comes from being good at your work, having some control over what you do, and the sense that your work is meaningful. There's more to it than that (it's recommended reading), but he's also a proponent of the idea that following your dreams is not a good idea. Is he right?

Sociologist Tim Clydesdale recently wrote *The Purposeful Graduate: Why colleges must talk to students about vocation*⁴⁶ making a similar point. The “why” of college is important to student success. He analyzed the effects of programs at 88 colleges and universities that had been funded by about a quarter billion dollars in grants from the Lilly Endowment⁴⁷ to encourage students to consider the purpose of their life and education. Some were religious schools, but many were not. In Dr. Clydesdale’s analysis, these programs had been a resounding success because students who can articulate a *purpose* build better lives than those who didn’t reflect on “why” to come up with a clear purpose or personal calling for their education and lives. He often found that students who didn’t take time to reflect on their purpose often had shallow motives like “make a lot of money” that led to less satisfying lives than those with a more thoughtful purpose like “provide sustainable agriculture practices to the poor in rural India.” Purpose was important, and there are a *quarter billion dollars* of proof reported in his book, right there.

As an aside, I was so impressed by this book that I recommended it to Beverly Warren, then president of Kent State University, when she was on a “listening tour.” Shortly after that, it was cited in her 2015 presidential address: “I believe that higher education should help students become what sociologist Tim Clydesdale calls the ‘purposeful graduate.’ His book of the same name shows the powerful benefits that result when we provide a college experience that is based more on a calling than a career path.”⁴⁸ The enduring theme of *purpose* was still around for her 2017 Presidential Address.⁴⁹ Eventually, this concept made it into our public relations efforts. At the time I’m writing this book, the main webpage declares “discover your purpose at Kent State,”⁵⁰ there are video testimonials of students who found their purpose, and the tagline of our 2018 Super Bowl commercial was “Purpose is what powers us, inspires us and drives the innovation we create to change our world.” Apparently, the message was received. You’re welcome, Bev.

Forgive the shameless credit taking, although to be honest Tim Clydesdale conducted the study and wrote the book. I just recommended it. I did email him to let him know that his work was having a real-world impact. He seemed pleased. My point is that, at the highest levels of leadership at this university, and thoroughly permeating the message that the university leadership is trying to send to students, is the centrality of discovering your purpose, *because that is superior to following your naïve (or impossible) dreams.*

Hot off the press is the final nail in the coffin of following your dreams. In *Psychological Science*, one of the best psychology research journals. O’Keefe, Dweck, and Walton (2018)⁵¹ argue that passions are developed, not found. Here, “passion” is used to mean your interests, such as career interests. The article abstract starts with this statement: “People are often told to find their passion as though passions and interests are pre-formed and must simply be discovered.” They then describe five studies designed to test the hypothesis that people develop their interests over time (a “growth mindset”) do not simply discover them (a “fixed mindset”). What they found was that people who have a fixed mindset regarding their interests were less able to appreciate things outside their narrow area of focus, didn’t anticipate the difficulties they would encounter in pursuing their passion, *and* became less interested in their passion when they did encounter difficulty. The abstract ends with: “Urging people to find their passion may lead them to put all their eggs in one basket but then to drop that basket when it becomes difficult to carry.”

Exactly.

In other words, the first-year student who declares, based on an archetype, that they're going to be a pediatric neurosurgeon is actually *less likely* to succeed than the student who allows their career interests to develop over time as they try different things (see **Chapters 16-17**), become acquainted with the range of opportunities their major affords them (see **Chapters 14-15**), and develops some skills and abilities that turn out to be real strengths (see **Chapter 13**). What guides their exploration? Their purpose—the *why* fuels the motivation to match their vocation (e.g., help children with neurological conditions) to good opportunities, of which there are many options. Case closed. Don't follow your dream. Develop your purpose.

What is Purpose?

According to eminent psychologist William Damon:

"Purpose is a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at the same time meaningful to the self and consequential for the world beyond the self. Getting good grades and into college does not in itself fulfill the demands of purposefulness; even the desire to achieve these ambitions to make a good living and raise a family, while better, does not fully qualify."⁵²

So purpose is: 1) pursuing meaningful accomplishments that 2) have positive consequences for the world beyond yourself. You could call this serving the "public good," which is what Universities were originally thought to accomplish.⁵³ Universities are fantastic places to develop, refine, and articulate your purpose.

You are (sort of) the Master of Your Destiny

Actually, this is great news. You should feel wonderful.

So many tears have been shed in my office when I crush dreams, but they transform into smiles when students realize that they haven't failed if they can't get the exact career or graduate school program that they wanted.

Consider Paul. He was determined to become a psychiatrist, which is a physician who has completed a long residency in psychiatry. He had not taken all of the pre-med/pre-osteopathy requirements, so he was not eligible to apply to medical school. He had some struggles in a few of the science classes, so his GPA was not high enough, even though he was a high-ability student. He had personal issues, like the fact that he could only come to school when his brother wasn't using the car. That's a real barrier to shadowing doctors, working in research labs, and so on. But so what? His *purpose* was to work with people who have a severe mental illness. We can work with that. There are dozens of careers that could leverage that noble purpose, such as social work, community mental health counseling, public health, patient advocacy, and so on. As predicted by O'Keefe, Dweck, and Walton (2018), his interest in psychiatry evaporated when he encountered a roadblock, but that was only because it was easily replaced by a broader range of interests rooted in the reason he had ever considered psychiatry. His destiny in psychiatry was out of reach, but he could still pursue a future that would involve working to help people with severe mental illnesses. Note that some careers helping people with mental illness require a graduate degree, but some do not. Choose **Section 2** (Graduate School Pathways) or **Section 3** (Career Pathways) and turn the page.

Assignments

Complete the following worksheet:

- Worksheet 3.1: My Passion, My Purpose

Your new goal: **“I will develop my purpose, which will motivate me and guide me to the right opportunities.”**

That’s the end of the free sample!

If you want the rest of the book (17 more chapters and 3 appendices) you can find the eBook on Amazon here:

<https://www.amazon.com/Pathways-Psychology-Majors-Graduate-Careers-ebook/dp/B07MPZ9NC3>

and the softcover here:

<https://www.amazon.com/Psychology-Pathways-Majors-Graduate-Careers/dp/173360250X>

Worksheet 3.1: My Passion, My Purpose

Many students had a “dream job” or “passion” that they were pursuing when they got to college. What was yours? Take some time to reflect on what that says about your purpose?

My Passion:	What this says about my Purpose:
Marine biologist.	Go exploring, and bring back discoveries that help solve the problems of society. Work outside a building, willing to be uncomfortable if it gets me into the field.
Sports psychologist.	Help people become excellent and overcome limitations. Help people compete to win.

My Purpose Statement: Take a moment to reflect on the purpose you are discovering from listing the values that guide your interests and occupational dreams. Can you articulate a *purpose statement*? Many students take a whole semester (or longer!) to discover their purpose, so don't worry if you don't have anything solid yet. One example of a purpose might be “I want to work in a field that allows me to help people live their full potential despite limitations.” If that were your purpose, it might point toward fields like occupational therapy, counseling, education, coaching, and so on. Notice how a clear purpose implies a wide variety of potential career options?

My purpose is to: _____.

About the author

Dr. Hughes grew up in Portland, Oregon, but left at 18 for college at Biola University in southern California. After college, he worked a couple years and then got an MA in clinical psychology at the University of Colorado in Colorado Springs. He then attended The Ohio State University where he received his PhD in 2001. He completed an internship at the Durham Veterans Affairs Medical Center, followed by a two-year postdoctoral fellowship in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Duke University Medical Center. Dr. Hughes started at KSU in 2003. He teaches undergraduate and graduate courses is a licensed psychologist in the state of Ohio and supervises clinical psychology graduate students in the Psychology Clinic. He has been the Graduate Admissions Coordinator, the Director of the Applied Psychology Center in the Department of Psychological Sciences, the Scientific Director of the Center for Cardiopulmonary Research at Summa Health System, and the Undergraduate Curriculum Coordinator for the Department. At the time this book is being written he is transitioning to a new role as Director of Clinical Training. Dr. Hughes is a Fellow of the American Association of Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Rehabilitation.

As a member of the faculty at Kent State University, the views expressed herein are Dr. Hughes' alone and not intended to represent the views of any public or private institution, or any funding agency. As a workbook is not a substitute for formal treatment, no part of this book is intended to diagnose or treat any condition, mental or physical. Dr. Hughes' views in this book are not intended to discriminate against or defame any person, real or imagined, or any group whether categorized by race, ethnicity, age, gender, sex, sexual orientation, or any other categorizing scheme.

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If this book helped you, please consider leaving a review on Amazon and recommending it to your friends.

`jhughes1 @ kent.edu` (no spaces).

If this book helped you, let me know. It would help if you indicate what parts of the book were helpful or not helpful so that future editions can be improved.

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