

The Educational System and Psychology Training in the United States

The educational system in Russia has been described to me as a multilevel educational system which includes either a Bachelors of Arts or Science degree, the possibility for a 4+1 specialty degree, masters degrees, and graduate school (Candidate of Science and doctorate degrees). We also have Bachelors of Arts and Science degrees. Some schools allow a 4+1 option in psychology. Stanford University, for example, has a program in which students can earn their undergraduate degree and masters degree in five years. Likewise we have masters degrees and doctoral degrees. However, there seem to be differences between our educational systems in how these degrees are obtained. I have outlined some information degrees at each level of education in the United States so that you can see the similarities and differences between our systems.

Undergraduate Degrees

As an undergraduate, you can earn either a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) or a Bachelor of Science (B.S.) degree. Traditionally, the difference between the two degrees is the B.A. requires two years of a foreign language while the B.S. does not. Instead of taking language courses, students opting for the B.S. degree take courses in science. So, the B.A. has more of a humanities focus and the B.S. more of a science focus.

Unlike Russia where all students start and end classes on the same days, schools do not always start on the same day in the United States. In fact, all schools do not follow the same course structure. There are two general systems for the academic year. With the semester system, classes start in either the last week of August or the first week of September and meet for 15 weeks ending sometime within the second or third week of December. Classes generally resume the second week of January and meet for another 15 weeks ending in late April or the beginning of May. Students typically take five courses per semester. The quarter system has three ten-week terms. The fall term usually starts in the middle of September. The winter term starts in the beginning of January. The spring term starts in the beginning of April. Students typically take three courses per quarter. A limited number of courses are offered over the summer for both systems.

Regardless of which system a school uses, a typical class meets for 45 hours per semester or term. This means that classes are held for 3 hours per week on the semester system and 5 hours per week on the quarter system. Therefore, we typically refer to classes as having either 3 semester hours or 5 quarter hours. There are some courses which deviate from the total number of hours. These courses are generally activity-based courses. For example, lab courses for science classes and courses in Health and Human Performance are usually only one semester hour. This means that a course in physical education will only meet for 15 hours per semester or one hour per week. The grading system is also the same for all schools. Grades are determined by professors and then converted to a 4.0 grading scale for the purpose of calculating a grade point average (commonly referred to as a GPA). The main difference between schools in determining GPA is whether or not they use a +/- system. The grading scales for these two systems are presented below.

Straight 4.0 Scale			+/- Scale		
<u>Grade</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	<u>GPA</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	<u>GPA</u>
A	> 90%	4.0	A	> 92.5%	4.0
B	80% - 89%	3.0	A-	90% - 92.5%	3.7
C	70% - 79%	2.0	B+	87.5% - 90%	3.3
D	60% - 69%	1.0	B	82.5% - 87.5%	3.0
F	< 60%	0.0	B-	80% - 82.5%	2.7
			C+	77.5% - 80%	2.3
			C	72.5% - 77.5%	2.0
			C-	70% - 72.5%	1.7
			D+	67.5% - 70%	1.3
			D	62.5% - 67.5%	1.0
			D-	60% - 62.5%	0.7
			F	< 60%	0.0

Students are required to General Education courses in almost every school. General Education is designed to provide students with a broad educational foundation. Students must also complete the requirements for their major. In psychology, a typical major will require students to take an introductory course in psychology, statistics, research methods, and then a certain number of psychology courses. Some schools require students to take lab classes in psychology. Students also have the option of participating in field experience and/or research.

Most psychology majors enter the work force once they graduate. Approximately only 10% of psychology majors apply to graduate school. In graduate school, students can either obtain a master degree or a doctoral degree.

Masters Degrees

There are a variety of masters programs that psychology majors apply for in the United States. Students who are interested in teaching in the public school system enter MAT (Master of Arts of Teaching) programs. Students interested in business careers may choose to enroll in a MBA (Master of Business Administration) program. However, the majority of students opt for a counseling related degree. There are masters programs in Marriage and Family Counseling, Counseling, School Counseling, School Psychology, and Social Work. There are also masters programs in applied areas of psychology such as industrial and organizational psychology. Masters programs are typically two years long. Those that involve counseling also include a one-year internship.

Doctoral Degrees

Students interested in clinical psychology have two options for doctoral training in psychology in the United States. First, there is the traditional doctorate of philosophy (Ph.D.). The second degree is a doctorate in psychology (Psy.D.). The Ph.D. is based on the scholar-practitioner model. Students in a clinical doctoral program are trained to conduct clinical research. The Psy.D. is based on a practitioner model. Students in these programs are primarily trained to work with clients. Although it is often debate which is the preferred degree, many psychologists recommend the Ph.D. for anyone interested in pursuing an academic career while the Psy.D. is recommended for students who only want to conduct a clinical practice. Both degrees involve four years of course work and training and one year of internship.

The Ph.D. is offered for all other areas of psychology. These programs generally take five to six years to complete. The first two years of the program are somewhat subscribed so students receive a strong foundation in the broad field of psychology. After this time, students are required to pass a comprehensive exam. Different schools have different comprehensive exams. Upon passing the comprehensive exam(s), students are eligible to become doctoral candidates. At this level, course work is reduced and is also highly specialized within a particular area of study. Dissertation work also begins. Students first must formally propose a dissertation study. When approved, the student is allowed to conduct the dissertation research. When the dissertation is complete, the student must defend his or her work. Conference of the degree depends on whether or not the final dissertation defense is passed. Some schools also require an final oral exam in order to complete the doctoral degree.