Psychology careers

Case studies

We're all interested in what makes people tick, how they think, act and interact with others. That's why studying undergraduate Psychology – the science of human behaviour – is interesting in its own right.

Studying a degree in Psychology will enable you to develop a wide range of sought after transferable skills. The knowledge and skills gained allows you to take advantage of a variety of job opportunities in areas such as education, human resources, commercial industry, management, advertising and marketing, research, the health professions, counselling and social services. (Some of these require further professional and/or specialised training). Here are some case studies from OU Psychology graduates which demonstrates the value of OU study, both in enabling a career change and the opportunity to become a professional psychologist.

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Mary C Younger

- BSc (Hons) Psych, PG Dip Couns., MSc, C.Psychol, AFBPsS
- Chartered Psychologist
- HPC Registered Practitioner Psychologist and Counselling Psychologist
- BPS Registered Psychotherapist and EuroPsych

It was the year 2000 when I very proudly received my Open University BSc (Hons) Psych at the Birmingham Symphony Hall. This was the springboard into the career that I really wanted and led me into an MSc and Post Masters qualification for Chartership, working as an Associate Psychologist and researcher with a local university before setting up a private practice. It is now five years since I provided my case study for the OU, how the time really does fly. Throughout my studies and professional practice, my deep regard for the OU and pride at having been a part of such an academy has never waned. Indeed, I believe that in the current climate the OU is needed more than ever.

My private practice: MY Counselling & Psychology Services has been running for 8 years now. A strong network of providers and colleagues has developed during this time, which helps greatly in terms of support and practically in coping with the waiting list that I have to manage. I have been involved with bringing together a group of professional, highly trained and experienced mind and body therapists at a holistic centre in Essex and this has become a thriving and busy community.

In 2010 I decided to undertake a Professional Doctorate in which I am exploring the cultivation and integration of self-compassion into personal and professional practice. One of my supervisors recently reminded me about the work of Mead and I found myself diving into my OU course books – which I won't part with – it was a happy reunion.

I have also trained as a teacher in Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction and Mindful Self-compassion, which has deeply enriched how I work and what I can offer to my clients. My work and continuing education has taken me all over the UK, Europe and in November 2014 to Boston in the US to present the initial stages of my Doctoral research.

Self-care is central to being able to do my job and keeping well and so I make sure that this is a priority not a luxury. I take time to rest, play, go on silent retreats and lots of hill walking. I also facilitate a meditation and contemplative practice group with a group of people in the healthcare sector. I took a break from studying in 2012/13 and it was so beneficial because when I re-registered for the 2013/14 year I had renewed energy.

My commitment to the OU and lifelong learning will continue as long as I do! I have lost count of the number of clients I have worked with over the years who I have wholeheartedly pointed in the direction of the OU. Long may it continue and thrive.

Francesca Heffernan

- Postgraduate Diploma in Psychology
- Currently studying Doctorate in Educational Psychology

My name is Francesca and I am currently studying for the Educational Psychology doctorate at the University of Sheffield. I did a Bachelor's degree in English and Theology and a Masters degree in Medieval Literature at other Universities when I was younger and became a teacher. However, I realised I wanted to continue studying and looked into my options. My mum was enjoying studying with the Open University at the time so I applied to do the Exploring Psychology module (DSE212). At this point I wasn't sure how far I would go with it but I knew I wanted to give it a go. At the time, I had left teaching and was working in children, young people and families' services with the local council, and I felt the introduction to psychology course would complement my work. My work hours were variable, I did lots of evening and weekend work, and I lived in a small town, so I was really pleased the Open University did a course I was interested in as otherwise I would not have been able to study again.

I started the course without a clear idea as to where it would lead, but as I enjoyed it so much I knew that I wanted to carry on. I looked into my options and found out that five modules would give me the opportunity to gain the Postgraduate Diploma in Psychology. So I then completed Child Development (ED209), Social Psychology (DD307), Exploring Psychology Project (DSR222) and Cognitive Psychology (DD303). During this time my local authority went through a restructure and all staff had to reapply for new jobs. I got a promotion through this process and I believe that this was in large part to do with my continuing study and interest in the theory behind the practices of my work.

My course offered monthly tutorials for all modules which I attended. These were in Oxford which was very convenient. The tutorial lecturers had very different styles which I found interesting, and they were always well prepared, delivered informative and informal lectures, and gave good feedback on assignments and answers to my emails. I also had two week long residentials and completed these in Bath. These were extremely enjoyable, both socially and academically, and I feel they offered an ideal complement to the individual study and tutorials. For my subject particularly it gave me the opportunity to complete psychological studies with other students, attend course lectures, and optional interest lectures which the lecturers gave on areas of their current research which stimulated my interest in psychology even more!

During the four years I studied with the Open University I learnt more than I imagined I would when I applied for my first course. I also made new friends and developed a love of psychology which has carried on after finishing my course. I got a distinction which I am

extremely proud of, and I know this is as much to do with the teaching, course materials and residentials as my own hard work. I found the modules well balanced in terms of offering the foundational information and giving opportunities to stretch myself academically. I feel the combination of assignments and exams allowed me to demonstrate my knowledge and abilities, and when I applied for my doctorate I felt confident when up against students from other universities. I feel the Open University develops many valuable skills, for example the ability to complete independent study, time management skills and research skills. These are proving useful to me in my doctorate study, and I am sure will be lifelong skills. The Educational Psychology doctorate is a competitive course to obtain a place on, and I was offered places at three out of the four places I applied to. I know that the qualification I obtained through the Open University, the knowledge I learnt and the skills I developed gave me the best opportunity to embark on my future career.

Heather Baumohl

- BSc (Hons) Psychology
- Currently training to be a Clinical Hypnotherapist

I have worked with volunteers for over 30 years, and as a senior executive for a national charity I have employed and managed both the staff team and my own department. My Open University Psychology degree gave me an understanding of what motivates people and what encourages them to stay engaged both as employees and volunteers. This helps when recruiting, motivating and encouraging staff and volunteers. It also enables me to be a collaborative team player and to get the best from staff, volunteers, colleagues and from myself! For me the Psychology degree was better than a management degree. A management degree usually focusses on models of management whereas the Psychology degree focuses on people, how they think and behave. As a manager of both volunteers and staff I needed to know how to engage and motivate the individual so that they could produce the best work possible and feel contented with their role and how to work as part of a team.

The Psychology degree also helped me to look ‘underneath the surface’ and to dig deeper as to why people behave in certain ways, which means sometimes I can prevent issues from arising and mediate successfully when required.

I am currently Chairman of the Association of Volunteer Managers (a voluntary role). The Psychology degree has formed the basis for me to understand individual, group and organisational behaviour. I am currently re-training to be a clinical hypnotherapist, again, my Psychology degree has been a great basis for understanding the different ideologies of how people think and behave. This enables me, as a therapist, to choose the best treatment for each patient.

David Dean

- BSc (Hons) Psychology
- MSc Occupational Psychology

OU graduate David is now an independent work & coaching Psychologist, supporting business executives & MBA clients with career & personal performance progression.

Following 20 successful years in the printing and paper industries working in research and development, technical services and learning and development world-wide, I decided to study for some proper qualifications having left school with nothing. Fortunately, I chose to embark upon my studies with The Open University for a BSc Honours degree in Psychology. Needless to say, study was tough having absolutely no idea what university discipline was about and what was needed to complete each module. However, after four hard-working years of fabulous support from the tutors and fellow students, I passed with a 2:1 degree.

I have since graduated from Leicester University with an MSc in Occupational Psychology. Moreover, the study skills learnt from the OU created the framework necessary for postgraduate education and subsequent important dissertation. Following the Msc in Occupational Psychology, I secured a role as a work psychologist at a prominent disability charity to design, develop and deliver their Welfare to Work coaching and learning programmes for disabled and long term unemployed clients. I have also been a visiting lecturer at the University of Westminster business school and volunteer to help local young people with their career choices and presentation skills.

Currently, I am a self-employed work and coaching psychologist, supporting businesses and private clients with learning and development, professional performance, career planning and transitions. I am also a Manchester Business School MBA student development coach and help clients overcome personal and professional development issues.

Finally, without the OU I would not have been able to go on to gain an MSc and a rewarding new career. Moreover, and potentially the most valuable aspect of my studies with The Open University, is that employers value the transferable skills, self-determination, time management, goal-setting and drive necessary to gain a distance learning degree. Thus showcasing all the necessary business, career skills &and abilities for any role or career transition. The Open University has changed my working life. The OU supports people to achieve their aspirations and makes their career day dreams become a reality.

Useful information

Psychology Forum

Each year there is an online Psychology Careers Forum, which can be found on the Q07 Psychology and Counselling qualification site. Once a forum has finished it remains accessible as a read-only resource until the next forum takes place. A wide range of topics are discussed including issues of age, work experience and postgraduate study.

Work experience for careers linked to psychology

The OU Careers Advisory Service has developed an online eBook for psychology students called "Work experience for careers linked to psychology". The Guide is for students and is available via the OU study and your career Psychology section of the Careers Advisory Service website. It aims to help students considering areas of professional psychology to identify appropriate types and sources of relevant experience that will help them move towards their goal of gaining a place in professional psychology.

Psychology Employability Guide

The Higher Education Academy Psychology Network has produced a guide to employability for psychology students and graduates.

The Open University Careers Advisory Service

www2.open.ac.uk/students/careers

The Service offers a range of professional career services including:

- Exploring your career options - links to online tools for generating possible career ideas.
- Career guidance interviews – you can contact a careers adviser for more in depth help by email, phone, Skype or face to face.
- Job seeking; Employer Showcase; Online vacancy service - Jobzone
- Online advice via Careers Forums and Webinars : Visit the website for details of planned forums and webinars and click through to existing read-only forums and recorded webinars.
- Publications: Career planning and Job seeking workbook available for current students. Covers all areas of planning your next steps and includes a range of activities to help you move forward.