A Job List of One's Own:
Creating Customized Career Information for Psychology Majors

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Overview

The opening words of the title are adapted from Virginia Woolf's 1929 essay, <u>A Room of One's Own</u>. Ms. Woolf argued that to be successful in a man's world, a woman writer needed a physical space of her own, other material advantages, and the freedom to be creative. In rough parallel, my premise is that, in the challenging and sometimes confusing world of career planning, psychology majors and their mentors are more likely to identify potential occupational pathways if they have their own ready access to useful information about a wide variety of jobs. I identify Internet resources that can enable users to easily obtain authoritative, detailed, and up-to-date information about the specifics of particular occupations, and conditions in the contemporary U.S. job market.

My article addresses a wide audience, including students, faculty members, career counselors, and scholars of the teaching of psychology. Regarding students' self-directed career development, they should carefully assess personal values, interests, and skills and use those dimensions as yardsticks by which to evaluate the available occupational information. For their part, faculty and professional staff can best decide how to employ this resource locally, perhaps as a reading assignment for an orientation course or as an aid in one-on-one advising sessions.

Outline of Contents

Introduction

Surveys indicate that a large number of psychology majors plan to attend graduate school (Gallucci, 1997; Rajecki, Appleby, Williams, Johnson, & Jeschke, 2005). However, other research shows that most psychology alumni enter the general job market with a BA or BS soon after graduation (Borden & Rajecki, 2000). Accordingly, whatever the future brings, undergraduates and their advisors should have access to quality information about a wide range of occupations. Of course, a good many career self-help articles, books, and Web sites already exist. Several offerings in this vein concentrate on features of relatively

high-level occupations, such as university professor or practicing clinician, held by individuals with advanced degrees. But I am also attentive to various authors' statements regarding entry-level jobs said to be "of interest" to the baccalaureate holder. Regrettably, the quality of advice in this latter domain is not uniformly high, with some traditional sources simply providing long lists of job titles presumably appropriate for psychology BA/BS alumni (Rajecki, 2008). For example, plausible-sounding entries in such lists might include "child care worker," "computer operator," "psychiatric aide," "statistical assistant," and "teacher assistant." That is, these titles sound as if they could demand the skills and knowledge gained through the formal study of psychology.

Plausibility notwithstanding, for a pop quiz, how many of the five jobs in the just-mentioned list actually require anything more than on-the-job training? To phrase this question another way, how many of the five require a bachelor's degree? The answer to both questions is "None of the above." Occupations in this little collection are quite open to people with a high school education. To be sure, some university graduates hold such jobs, but clear majorities of their coworkers never attended college or did not complete a bachelor's degree (Rajecki, 2008). In short, psychology baccalaureates are technically overqualified for work in the five jobs considered in this section.

A Public Source of Job Information: O*NET

A job list would gain in information value if students and advisors had a reliable way to check on real-world employment characteristics. The good news is that anyone can quickly become a successful job sleuth by taking advantage of free services via the Internet. For instance, my claims in connection with the five jobs just mentioned are based on public sources of information made available by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). A wonderful collection of useful data can be obtained from an online DOL service called the "Occupational Information Network," or O*NET for short. Indeed, DOL writers declare that the O*NET package is America's primary source of occupational information.

Getting the Information You Want

By any standard, O*NET is a huge program, designed to serve the needs of many types of readers including job seekers and employment professionals. This is not the place to discuss every complex facet of O*NET. For the present purpose it is sufficient to say that with just a little effort users can begin to reap bountiful harvests of enlightening facts. As a short training exercise, start with two job titles: clinical psychologists, and personal and home care aides. In minutes, a student or advisor can assemble impressively detailed profiles for these occupations based on O*NET features called "Descriptors" (or "Other Information"). To show how, I provide instructions for generating selected O*NET output, and next explain what that output means. When you are connected to the Internet, complete these 10 steps:

> 1. log on to http://www.onetcenter.org
> 2. click the Visit O*NET OnLine Today! link

3. click the Find Occupations link
4. type a job title in the Quick Search keyword box (e.g., clinical psychologists)
5. click GO
6. click the Clinical Psychologists link (the first line in the list)
7. click the Custom box
8. click the Skills, Tasks, and Job Zone boxes in the O*NET Descriptor list
9. click the Education and Wages & Employment boxes in the Other Information list
10. click GO

Understanding the Information You Get

Assuming everything worked properly, completion of the preceding steps will have resulted in considerable information about the work of clinical psychologists. Here are summaries of what the current O*NET output categories mean. (Information in this section was located at the http://online.onetcenter.org/help/ link in O*NET. Data from searches conducted on different dates may vary due to DOL updates.)

Skills output: This is a set of competencies (e.g., active listening, reading comprehension, social perceptiveness) rank-ordered in terms of the judged importance of each for the job in question. DOL analysts employed rating scales to obtain respondents' estimates. Technically, the numbers and bars to the left of particular skill lines represent conventionally standardized scale scores, having a possible numerical range of 0 to 100. Verbally, the range is not important (0) to extremely important (100).

Tasks output: As in the preceding matter of skills, the importance of various tasks (e.g., diagnose disorders, discuss the treatment of problems) involved in the occupation are rank-ordered in terms of rating scale standardized scores ranging from 0 to 100.

Job Zone output: This output has to do with ways most people get into the work or how much overall experience or education they need to do the job. DOL defines Job Zone 1 as "occupations that need little or no preparation." For Job Zones 2-5, replace "little or no" with the words "some," "medium," "considerable," and "extensive," respectively.

Further, under the rubric of Job Zone, a line appears for SVP Range. SVP stands for Specific Vocational Preparation, and amounts to a 9-item scale of mutually exclusive and non-overlapping levels of required time in vocational training. According to DOL terminology:

1 = short demonstration only
2 = anything beyond demonstration up to and including 1 month
3 = over 1 month up to and including 3 months
4 = over 3 months up to and including 6 months
5 = over 6 months up to and including 1 year
6 = over 1 year up to and including 2 years
7 = over 2 years up to and including 4 years

8 = over 4 years up to and including 10 years
9 = over 10 years

Education output: In various reports, DOL identifies three levels (categories) of formal educational attainment: (1) high school or less, (2) some college, and (3) bachelor's degree or higher. For the job in question, the numbers and bars in this panel express the known percentages of workers from each attainment category.

Wages & Employment Trends output: At the national level, two lines are of immediate interest: median annual wages and projected change in numbers of workers in the decade from 2004 to 2014.

Sample O*NET Output Profile #1: Clinical Psychologists

Based on the site information in mid-2007, for clinical psychologists the three most important skills are active listening (100, the maximum standard score), reading comprehension (91), and social perceptiveness (90). Three important tasks are to identify psychological, emotional, or behavioral issues, and diagnose disorders (92), develop and implement individual treatment plans (91), and interact with clients to assist them in gaining insight (88). Clinical psychologists stem from the highest job zone (5), and their impressive SVP range (8 or above) reflects the need for postgraduate training and licensure. Naturally, almost all (99%) have a bachelor's degree or higher. These professional credentials warranted median annual wages in 2005 of about $57,000, and for the foreseeable future there will be demands for additional practitioners.

Sample O*NET Output Profile #2: Personal and Home Care Aides

Repeat the 10 O*NET search steps described previously for a profile of personal and home care aides. Because care aides help the elderly and disabled, one might expect some similarities between them and clinical psychologists. Even so, some sharp differences seem certain to emerge. Similarities exist in that three important skills for care aides are active listening (82), social perceptiveness (82), and service orientation (76). Further, three important tasks are to perform health care, such as monitoring vital signs and medication (86), administer bedside and personal care, such as ambulation and hygiene assistance (86), and prepare and maintain records of client progress and services performed (80). However, in contrast to their professional counterparts, care aides stem from a much lower job zone (2), and their SVP range is rather modest (4 to < 6). In terms of formal education, fully 60% of care aides reach only the level of high school or less, and as few as 10% have a bachelor's degree or higher. These features correlated with relatively low median annual wages in 2005 of about $17,000. On the bright side, there will be a strong demand for more care aides in the future, possibly because of the aging boomer generation.

A Job List of One's Own

The current training exercise involved two job profiles: clinical psychologists, and personal and home care aides. As a matter of fact, O*NET provides access to equivalent information concerning over 800 different occupational titles. Also, the current exercise involved five O*NET Descriptors or Information features: Education, Job Zone, Skills, Tasks, and Wages & Employment Trends. Actually, O*NET offers additional types of informative Descriptors, including Interests, Knowledge, Related Occupations, Work Activities, Work Context, and Work Styles. Users can choose any or all options in the program's menu.

An implication of this enormous resource is that students and advisors can use O*NET to investigate job names they encounter anywhere. Look to articles, books, or Web sites for ideas, or even make up your own titles. You may not find an exact match, but something relevant could turn up. In other words, anyone can produce a richly detailed job list of her or his own.

Suggested Job Titles in Three Categories

For a starter list of a range of occupations, I suggest 18 titles likely found in previously published lists of psychology-related jobs. These examples are loosely categorized in terms of expected academic degrees and employee status.

Postgraduate degree holders (PhD, PsyD, masters) work in universities, institutions, and practice as, for example, counseling psychologists, Industrial/Organizational psychologists, marriage and family therapists, psychology teachers (postsecondary), school psychologists, and substance abuse and behavioral disorder counselors.

Some baccalaureates work in managerial and technical positions as, for example, human resources managers, market research analysts, public relations managers, sales managers, social/community service managers, and survey researchers.

Other baccalaureates, along with associates and high school graduates, work, for example, as child care workers, computer operators, loan interviewers or clerks, psychiatric aides, statistical assistants, and teacher assistants.

Further Reading

As described here, O*NET is a great place to start learning about the job market. But useful U.S. government services do not end with O*NET. Other DOL occupational publications are available online that cover roughly the same jobs found in O*NET, but with a somewhat different perspective, emphasis, or level of detail. Consider the following two resources.

Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH). According to its Web homepage, the OOH "is a nationally recognized source of career information, designed to provide valuable assistance to individuals making decisions about their future work lives." It can be found at http://www.bls.gov/oco/home.htm

Occupational Projections and Training Data (OPTD). According to its Web homepage, the OPTD is the statistical and research supplement to the OOH. It presents information of value to planners, counselors, and job seekers, and can be found at http://www.bls.gov/emp/optd/home.htm

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