

MILLERSVILLE UNIVERSITY PSYCHOLOGY GRADUATES: *Where Are They Now?*

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ABSTRACT

We present the results of a social media search aimed at finding the current career status of two cohorts of psychology graduates from Millersville University; specifically, those receiving B.A. degrees in the 2005 and 2010 calendar years. Using publicly available information from social media sites (mostly LinkedIn), we conclusively located over a third of each cohort and found that approximately half of those found had gone on to pursue graduate study. This study demonstrates how a simple, non-intrusive strategy can be used to complement alumni assessment initiatives.

Thousands of students pass through the doors of Millersville University every year. As many of the students graduate and move on, they seem to vanish into the world. Universities, however, benefit from exploring the career trajectories of their graduates and public social media sites provide a simple, non-intrusive, and effective way to do so. This project focused on two cohorts, 2005 and 2010 graduates, and was designed to track the graduate school and career status of psychology majors five and ten years after graduation.

METHOD

We used internet searches and public social media sites to locate two cohorts of psychology graduates from Millersville University. Sources of information included LinkedIn, company websites, online legal documents, Facebook, and other public internet sources. The individuals were only indicated as “found” if we could confirm a link to Millersville and locate professional employment information or graduate school attendance status.

RESULTS

The graduating psychology class from 2005 had ninety-eight graduates, while the 2010 class had one hundred fifty-six. Forty-five graduates (46%) were found from the 2005 cohort, while fifty-eight graduates (37%) were found from the 2010 cohort. In the 2005 cohort, thirty-three (34%) of graduates had LinkedIn accounts, while in the 2010 cohort, fifty (32%) of graduates had LinkedIn accounts (Figure 1).

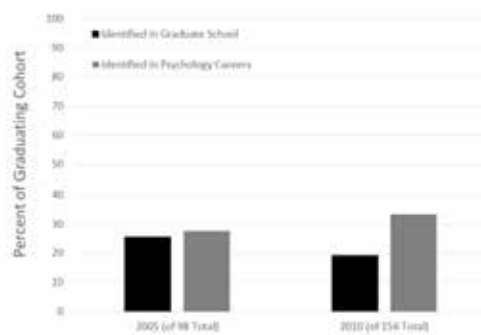


Figure 1. Percentages of psychology graduates from the 2005 and 2010 classes who were identified online and those specifically identified with LinkedIn accounts.

Several Millersville graduates indicated graduate school affiliations through school websites or information included on LinkedIn profiles. In the 2005 cohort, there were twenty-five graduates (26%) who indicated that they were in – or had attended – graduate school, while the 2010 cohort had thirty graduates (19%) reporting so (Figure 2).

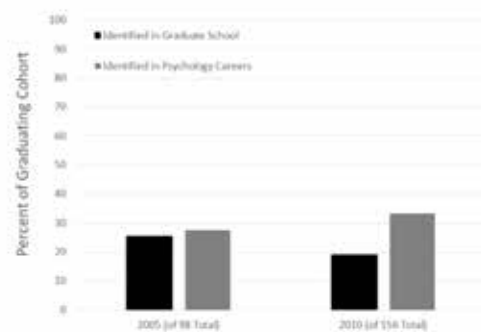


Figure 2. Percentages of psychology graduates from the 2005 and 2010 classes who were identified as having attended graduate school and identified in psychology-related careers.

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It was typically possible to discern whether our alumni went to graduate school for psychology or non-psychology-related fields. Examples of psychology-related fields include clinical psychology, counseling, social work, and applied behavioral analysis. Of course, psychology can be applied to almost any profession, but we identified non-psychology-related fields to include nursing, business-administration, public health, and education.

In the 2005 cohort, twenty-five (26%) found Millersville graduates indicated attending graduate school. Of these twenty-five, fifteen attended graduate school for a psychology-related field, while ten went to graduate school in other fields, such as business. In the 2010 cohort, thirty (19%) Millersville graduates indicated attending graduate school (Figure 2). Of the thirty graduates, twenty-seven of them attended graduate school for a psychology-related field, while three went to graduate school for other occupations, such as a physician’s assistant.

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In terms of employment, it was often difficult to determine whether the jobs taken by the 2005 and 2010 cohorts were psychology-related. Some jobs, such as a Therapeutic Staff Support and Rehabilitation Therapist, were clearly psychology related, while others, such as a Transition Coordinator, were more difficult to classify. Due to the lack of detail on the jobs found, only jobs that were clearly linked to psychology were given the “psychology-related” designation.

If multiple jobs were listed on the individual’s profile, only the most recent job was taken into consideration. If an individual indicated two present jobs and one was psychology-related, the individual was counted as in a psychology-related field. In the 2005 cohort, forty-one graduates had clear job information listed on the internet, while fifty-five graduates of the 2010 cohort had clear job information listed.

Of course, the identified graduates represent only a fraction of all graduates and certainly under-estimate total percentages. When looking at percentages of the graduates we found, 56% of the **identified** 2005 cohort and 52% of the **identified** 2010 cohort attended graduate school. Sixty percent of the **identified** 2005 cohort had psychology-related jobs, while 90% of the **identified** 2010 cohort had psychology-related jobs (Figure 3).

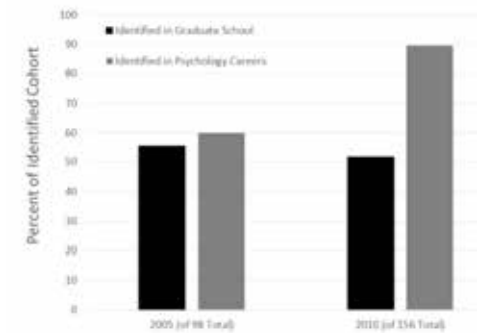


Figure 3. Percentages of identified psychology graduates from the 2005 and 2010 classes who had attended graduate school and/or had psychology-related careers.

DISCUSSION

Individuals can be expected to exaggerate what they report on social media and verifying information is costly and time consuming, but no more costly than traditional outreach methods like phone, mail, or email.

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They should, therefore, be the first avenues by which educational institutions can connect with graduates. In doing so, the schools can cultivate alumni relationships and, perhaps, gain valuable knowledge about how well they prepare

students for the workforce.

Of course, web-based studies have limitations. First, a large percent of the 2005 and 2010 cohorts were not found and totals certainly underestimate the actual number of students seeking graduate study or engaged in the professional fields of psychology. However, we suspect that the graduates who maintain professional online profiles might be among the most successful and, therefore, easiest to find; any investigation that reports students as a fraction of the total found, would overestimate proportions of graduate school attendees and psychological professionals. Therefore, Figure 3 probably shows a “success bias.” The real story is somewhere in between the raw numbers of students found and the

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proportional success of those identified. Additionally, success can be inflated in cases of self-report. LinkedIn is a networking site and often a vehicle for advancing one's career. Modesty is not rewarded. Individuals can be expected to exaggerate what they report on social media and verifying information is costly and time consuming, but no more costly than traditional outreach methods like phone, mail, or email.

We have some information about the careers and whereabouts of our recent graduates; some are doctors, a few are nurses, some are therapists, some are real estate agents, and many work in psychology-related fields.

Though only exploring two cohorts, it is interesting to note that the more recent graduates (class of 2010) are as likely to have been engaged in graduate school than the more senior group (class of 2005). One might expect the probability of graduate school enrollment to increase with time, but that was not the case among identified graduates. Additionally, a large proportion of identified 2010 graduates, when compared to the 2005 graduates, might reflect an inclination to stay with positions built from a familiar undergraduate internship for the first few years after graduating and then expanding beyond the realm of psychology as an individual's professional identity develops.

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Future investigations could follow the model of a longitudinal study done by Sulastris and Janssens (2015). These researchers looked at grade point average and biographical data in personal resumes as predictors of long-term employment success among psychology graduates. These researchers found that the probability of finding a psychology-based job was correlated with undergraduate GPA, within the major. We would expect to find the same among our graduates, but have yet to collect supporting evidence.

As this study concludes, approximately one hundred Millersville University graduates have been identified and a more aggressive effort, incorporating phone calls and mailings, would have yielded more. However, low-cost web-based searches can provide a basic platform for a broader, comprehensive alumni assessment project.

We have some information about the careers and whereabouts of our recent graduates; some are doctors, a few are nurses, some are therapists, some are real estate agents, and many work in psychology-related fields. We suspect that their undergraduate education is serving them in their professional lives, but we should make every effort to validate our assumptions. Social media provide an obvious and cost-effective path to exploring and reporting the success stories of our graduates.

REFERENCES

Sulastris, A., Handoko, M., & Janssens, J.M.A.M. (2015). Grade point average and biographical data in personal resumes: Predictors of finding employment. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 20(3), 306-316.

Chelsea Fleeger is a graduate student in the Master of Science in Psychology program. Her adviser for this project was Dr. Shawn Gallagher, an associate professor of Psychology. These results were presented at the 2016 meeting of the Pennsylvania Psychological Association.