Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

A bachelor's degree in psychology qualifies a person to assist psychologists and other professionals in community mental health centers, vocational rehabilitation offices, and correctional programs; to work as research or administrative assistants; and to take jobs as trainees in government or business. However, without additional academic training, their advancement opportunities in psychology are severely limited.

Persons with a master's degree in psychology can administer tests as psychological assistants. Under the supervision of doctoral level psychologists, they can conduct research in laboratories, conduct psychological evaluations, counsel patients, or perform administrative duties. They may teach in high schools or 2-year colleges or work as school psychologists or counselors.

- In most cases, 2 years of full-time graduate study are needed to earn a master's degree in psychology. Requirements usually include practical experience in an applied setting or a master's thesis based on a research project. A master's degree in school psychology requires about 2 years of course work and a 1-year internship.

A doctoral degree generally is required for employment as a psychologist. Psychologists with a Ph.D. qualify for a wide range of teaching, research, clinical, and counseling positions in universities, elementary and secondary schools, private industry, and government. Psychologists with a Psy.D. (Doctor of Psychology) qualify mainly for clinical positions.

- Five to 7 years of graduate work usually are required for a doctoral degree. The Ph.D. degree culminates in a dissertation based on original research. Courses in quantitative research methods, which include the use of computers, are an integral part of graduate study and usually necessary to complete the dissertation. The Psy.D. is usually based on practical work and examinations rather than a dissertation. In clinical or counseling psychology, the requirement for the doctoral degree generally include a year or more of internship or supervised experience.