



Preface

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, . . . it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.

—Charles Dickens (1812–1870)

Excerpted from the opening lines of Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities*, these words ring true for many college students today. Arguably, the need for, promises of, and access to higher education have never been greater than in the second decade of the 21st century. In this respect, it is the best of times to be a college student. Yet the challenges students encounter while forging their college education into a satisfying career are daunting. Many students may face three crises as they graduate. The first is overwhelming *loan debt*, with repayment typically beginning 6 months after they leave college whether or not they are employed. The second crisis is *unemployment* or *underemployment* in an unstable national and global economy where countless jobs continue to be outsourced, replaced by technology, or simply terminated. The third crisis, nurtured in part by the first two, is that of (returning to Dickens) *great expectations*. Students are conditioned from elementary school to believe that a college degree will place them on a fast track to personal success in a secure and satisfying career. Yet competition for the best postgraduate opportunities continues to be fierce: In 2009–2010, there were 97,216 recipients of a bachelor’s degree in psychology in a total graduating class of 1.65 million baccalaureate recipients (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). So these may also be the worst of times for college students and, for some, times filled with despair or frustration but little hope.

Teachers are concerned about the world their baccalaureate graduates must enter. Psychology educators are passionate about dispersing psychological science, but they may not be experts in the current job market or in how to help psychology students choose and succeed in a career. For example, to what extent are their students aware of the clashing cultures of corporate and college organizations and of the particular skills and behaviors they need to succeed? Do students know how to market themselves effectively amidst the competition and subsequently adapt to the workplace once they are hired?

Our goal in writing *Your Undergraduate Degree in Psychology* is to help students enter the workforce during and after college cognizant of the issues and prepared for the challenges they will encounter. We strongly believe that teachers can be highly influential partners in this goal. There are no quick and easy solutions to these issues and challenges, but we introduce them for serious discussion and share ideas, insights, and recommendations we believe will help build competence and confidence for a student's journey after college. The salient features of this book include the following.

Many “careers in psychology” books focus primarily on occupations requiring baccalaureate or graduate degrees and the skills students should learn. We approach the college-to-career transition for what it truly is—a diverse and interactive combination of dynamic intrapersonal, interpersonal, and environmental career-shaping experiences. Specifically, we encourage students to engage in systematic self-assessment; exploit campus opportunities that enhance self-reflection and career development; establish transferable skills employers seek; heighten awareness of their continuing journey through psychosocial development; master job-search skills; recognize the critical roles that organizational culture, communications, motivation, and self-management occupy in entry-level job success; and prepare for changing relationships and further life/career transitions. We know of no other resource in psychology that examines these dimensions to the extent we do.

Our focus is on individuals who enter the labor market immediately after graduation, including students who delay entry to graduate or professional school for 1 or more years to gain experience, earn money, and solidify goals. So welcome also, you graduate-school-bound students!

Your Undergraduate Degree in Psychology may be read as part of a course, such as Careers in Psychology, Orientation to the Psychology Major, or Introduction to the Psychology Major. It is also intended as supplementary reading for internship and capstone courses. Even if this book is not part of a specific course, the key is for students to critically examine the information it reveals and act on the recommendations we present. Ultimately, students *need* to know the answers to the questions, “How can I be best prepared to stand out from other new graduates entering the world of work?” and “How can I succeed in my first jobs?” Those are the types of questions we can help with!

To accomplish our goal of helping students prepare for work and career, we provide a forum in which students and teachers interact with one another and with us—as “paperback mentors” of sorts—as we explore the crucial issues that influence successful entry into contemporary workplaces. Having engaging interaction

with a book and its ideas is a challenge, but it can be done. We designed this book to help students actively think about the world of work and career choices; frequent and meaningful self-reflection can lead to a strategic plan to help students pursue their life goals. The features we embedded in this book to facilitate self-reflection include “Time Out” sections inserted periodically in our narrative: “Time Out: Reflective Questions” and “Time Out: Exercise.” At the end of each chapter are “Getting Involved” activities that include “Journal Starters” and diverse and often research-oriented projects that teachers may want to assign as is or modify to fit their specific goals. The “Additional Resources” component of each chapter enables students to dig further into a particular topic by consulting websites or other print sources. Each chapter ends, of course, with a list of the references we consulted for the topics we addressed.

College-to-workplace preparedness and transition is a major topic of growing importance in today’s world of work, but it is not widely researched in psychology. Consequently, we invited colleagues with expertise exceeding our own in specific critical areas to guest-author chapters on career planning, job search, and post-college relationship changes. In addition, an important segment of our literature is drawn from outside of mainstream psychological research; this portion derives from surveys or reports of job-related issues originating from such organizations as the Collegiate Employment Research Institute and the National Association of Colleges and Employers, as well as from popular but reliable print and electronic sources. Finally, we illustrate several concepts using examples based on the experiences of former students and actual events.

No book project of this magnitude thrives without excellent advice. We are very grateful to many individuals who have been helpful and supportive throughout our journey. This has clearly been a team effort. In the editorial department at SAGE, Christine Cardone was our starting pitcher and Reid Hester came in as the closer. We are very thankful for Sarita Sarak, who kept us, in her firm but friendly manner, on track each step of the way and batted 1.000. Our team contains other valuable members. For the breadth and depth they shared on crucial topics, we thank our guest authors Camille Helkowski, John Jameson, and Abby (Wilner) Miller.

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To mix our metaphors, it takes a village to win a game, and we are thankful for every member of the team that made for our cumulative game-winning effort. And, last but not least, we as coauthors have grown in knowledge and wisdom from our mutual collaboration.

Reference

National Center for Education Statistics. (2011). *Digest of education statistics 2011*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d11/tables/dt11_286.asp