

Bronte Morgan, Research and Project Officer - Transcript

Denise: Today, I'm talking to Bronte Morgan. She's a Research and Project Officer at the University of Sydney and she had her Bachelors Psychology Honours at UNSW. Hi Bronte, thanks for being here.

Bronte: Hi, Denise.

Denise: So, Bronte, let's start with what you do. What kind of work do you do as a Research and Project Officer at you said?

Bronte: Yeah, so, I'm working on a large longitudinal project which is tracking along with a big sample of families from the Southwestern Sydney Local Health district and we're tracking along with these families across the first three years of their child's life. We're trying to understand what different factors kind of predict mental health disorders in childhood and whether there's trans-diagnostic factors. Yeah, and the ultimate aim is to see if we can identify mental health issues earlier on.

Denise: Great, thanks. Bronte, is this the first job that you've had after studying?

Bronte: Yeah, it was so I finished my Honours in 2018 and I think I was just really tired. And I thought I'd take a year off and then come back and apply for the Masters program. But I've now been in this job for three years because I've really enjoyed it. I've enjoyed working in research and I think I was quite surprised that I wanted to kind of stay on. And I think it's also kind of opened my mind to yeah, different jobs made me realize that maybe like the Clinical Masters isn't for me, or isn't for me yet. So yeah, it definitely wasn't my plan. I think I was going to take a year off study and come back to it, but I've enjoyed sticking around and I think because it's a longitudinal project that I've been working on, it's been cool to like stay around to see like the different phases of the project. And we've actually only just finished data collection, so it's cool to like have seen it through to that point. And now it's we're entering this phase of wrapping it up and getting all the data cleaned and ready to use, which is really different and exciting.

Denise: Absolutely, yeah. So, what is it that you like so much about doing research?

Bronte: I think I really like the process of answering a question. And I think I like using different skills and I think you know in some ways research and being a research assistant can be quite tedious. And it's like, especially on a large project, it's like the same thing over and over and over again, especially in the kind of data collection phase when we're just testing and testing and testing and testing hundreds of families on the same thing. But then, on the flip side, being in this position has been like so diverse, and so I think I like using all sorts of different skills, and developing those skills. So, of course, all the kind of participant management things, and getting to know people and actually like meeting families and like doing the tasks with the children has been great, but obviously did get tedious as well. But we've also been able to develop skills in writing, doing presentations, data analysis, lots of different project management things. So, I think what I love about the job is that there is like a diversity in skills that I feel like I'm really like growing.

Denise: Absolutely. So, what are some of the skills that you learned in your psychology degree or in or in your Honours time that you are using a lot on this job? What are some of the most useful skills that you learned?

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Bronte: I think the most useful skill, if I can like summarize, is how to ask and answer questions and I think the psych degree and especially the Honours year, but just in general, I think I came out of the degree with like this unique combination of a lot of writing practice, but also this kind of research methods and data skills. And so, I think the like most helpful skill that I have from the degree that I've kind of just continued developing is that that ability to ask and answer questions using kind of a combination of different skills, but especially that kind of critical thinking and like how are we going to measure this kind of question.

Denise: So, I think a lot of psychology students might be interested in getting a job like the one you have after their studies. Can you talk about a little bit about how you got your job?

Bronte: Yeah, well I was in a really very lucky position of my Honours supervisor is actually a chief investigator on the project that I'm working on. So, at the end of the Honours year she came up to me and said 'this project that I'm working on are looking for a research assistant, would you be interested?' And I think because I was like, yeah, I'm going to take a year off, yeah, sure, I'll take any job! I kind of applied for that got that job. I think having my supervisor as like a network connection was helpful. It was helpful to have had the kind of Honours year experience to kind of show my research experience, and then I've just kind of stuck around.

Denise: You need to have done your Honours in psychology to apply for a job like the one you have?

Bronte: I don't think so. I think it helps because you've had that kind of independent research experience and in the Honours year you kind of get experience across the across the range of skills like recruiting participants, gathering the data, pretty much independently or it was for me. Data analysis and then writing it up. So I think, it helps to kind of have those skills. But I did have a casual RA job prior to me doing Honours, so I know both are possible.

Denise: Do you have any advice Bronte, for students who are in their undergrad in psychology right now?

Bronte: I think I would just really remind them that no learning is wasted. I really believe that. And I think in my current position, I've really enjoyed getting to know all sorts of different people who've had such kind of squiggly careers. And I think the people that I most admire, and I've learned the most from, our people who've done all sorts of different careers with their own psychology degree. And whether they've used that in a clinical setting or whether they've done more kind of project management positions, whether they've worked in universities or in other kinds of settings. Like, I think the people that I most admire and I want to learn more from are those that have had like really rich experiences by being open to all sorts of different things. So, I think my advice would be to remember that no learning is wasted and to kind of stay open.

Denise: Yeah, I 100% agree with that. What are some of the skills that you learned studying psychology that are really helpful to you now?

Bronte: Yeah, I think, if I can like summarize the skills or the skill set, I think the most useful skill set is really like how to how to ask and answer questions. And I think what I mean by that is that I think my

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psychology undergraduate really gave me training in both that critical thinking, so, like what kind of question do we want to be asking you? Is this a worthwhile question? But then also, how do we answer it and what like what do we do to address kind of this gap? And I think the psychology degree gave me kind of a good set of skills in writing skills, presentation skills and communication skills but also kind of like thinking about measurement and data and analysis and interpreting that information, which I think is a really helpful combination of skills to have. And I think that those skills are applied in my job in the kind of actual research and the kind of questions we're answering. But also in when you know we're planning the project, making kind of data driven decisions about you know how we're going to meet those project goals and making those plans really thoughtfully, and like how to evaluate the success of the project using kind of those skills as well.

Denise: Yeah, thanks Bronte. So, you're at relatively the beginning of your career in psychology. Do you have any ideas now where you are now and what you might do next?

Bronte: I think I still feel like I'm not sure, but I think I'm OK with that. As I said, I was going to take just a year off and come back and do the Masters, but I think being in the real world and having this job will itself has been so varied and has helped me meet so many different people with all sorts of different careers and different ways that they've applied their psychology degree or their other degree. Yeah, I think I might become a maybe a bit more open minded to where I will go next. As I said I've been working in a university setting, which has been interesting, but I think I'd be open to maybe moving into like a government department or maybe an NGO or a charity. I'm really interested in child development, so there's lots of different charities and organizations that I've realized that I have skills that I could bring to some jobs that yeah are on offer there.

Denise: Definitely. There are a lot of transferable skills from what you're doing now to a lot of companies.

Bronte: Thank you. I have realized that, but I think I didn't know that when I was first like finishing my degree.

Denise: Yeah, I think that's really fair. I think we all don't know that when we're starting to study, right? We think, well I'm going to study this and it leads to this specific job.... It's not actually how the world works.

Bronte: Yeah, and I think you've also got to work out whether you want that.

Denise: And what you want will change throughout your life possibly. Well, thank you so much for talking to me today, Bronte, this was wonderful. Thanks.

Bronte: My pleasure, thanks, Denise.