

# Psychology, MA

Graduate study in psychology is designed for students seeking the PhD. Students enrolled in the doctoral program may elect to receive a Master of Arts (MA) when they have completed the necessary requirements.

## Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- develop skills to design and carry out independent and team-based research projects;
- develop an understanding of multiple statistical techniques to support independent data analysis skills;
- develop skills to effectively communicate research results to a range of audiences in both written and oral formats;
- develop the capability to independently teach a course; and
- follow the highest ethical standards when conducting research and communicating results.

## Requirements

The graduate program in psychology is primarily a PhD program. The program does not admit students who have a terminal master's degree in psychology as their objective. Students in good standing in the psychology PhD program may elect to receive a master's degree at the end of the second year. Additionally, students who are terminated from the PhD program may elect to switch to the MA program. In both cases, the degree is an MA without thesis.

The Master of Arts without thesis program in psychology requires 37 s.h. of graduate credit. Students must maintain a cumulative and program grade-point average of at least 3.00 to earn the degree. Each student must satisfy a portion of the course requirements of the PhD program. The MA requirements are organized around training areas. For the MA, the student must have completed the coursework that would normally be expected by that point in the program, according to the training area's required/recommended coursework (see the graduate handbook on the department's website). Exceptions must be approved by the area coordinator and director of graduate studies. Each student must have an advisor (a member of the department faculty who has agreed to advise and sponsor the student) at all times.

Students must earn 30 of the required 37 s.h. at the University of Iowa. Coursework for the MA nonthesis program must include at least 15 s.h. earned in Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences courses and seminars, or in courses and seminars that meet area-specific requirements for one of the training areas. The MA without thesis does not require a final exam.

## Graduate Training Areas

### Behavioral and Cognitive Neuroscience

The program in behavioral and cognitive neuroscience focuses on the analysis of learning, memory, attention, motivation, aging, sensory processing, and sleep, in both human and nonhuman subjects, through the application of behavioral and biological principles. Special faculty strengths are in the neurobiology of learning and memory, cognitive neuroscience, motivation and emotion, developmental psychobiology, comparative psychology, neuropharmacology,

neuroendocrinology, and neuroanatomy. Students in this program have the opportunity to learn state-of-the-art techniques in computer-controlled experimentation and electronic instrumentation as well as advanced analytic and laboratory methods in neurophysiology, nonhuman neurosurgery, histology, neuroimaging, and assays of biochemical activity.

Faculty members in the behavioral and cognitive neuroscience area interact extensively with colleagues in other divisions in the department, in the Iowa Neuroscience Institute, and in many basic science and clinical departments in the Carver College of Medicine, including anatomy and cell biology, otolaryngology—head and neck surgery, pharmacology, internal medicine, pediatrics, psychiatry, and neurology. These collaborative activities provide excellent research and training opportunities for students interested in emerging interdisciplinary fields.

### Clinical Science

The clinical science training program emphasizes a scientific approach to the understanding of psychological disorders and the influence of psychological factors on human relationships and health. The program is accredited by the Psychological Clinical Science Accreditation System (PCSAS), has been continuously accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of the American Psychological Association since 1948, and is a charter member of the Academy for Psychological Clinical Science.

The program is designed for students who are interested primarily in helping to advance scientific understanding of clinical phenomena and in acquiring the research skills necessary to do so. Faculty members and students have active research collaborations with colleagues from many departments in the university's Carver College of Medicine and College of Public Health and at the VA Iowa City Health Care. Many of the program's faculty members conduct externally funded research programs that use cutting-edge behavioral science to develop an improved understanding of mechanisms, processes, and interventions for mental disorders. Faculty members have strong training records, and the program's graduates have gone on to top-tier research, teaching, and clinical service positions.

The clinical psychology program provides first-hand clinical experience and opportunities to develop clinical competence that are integral to clinical research. It closely integrates practicum experience in the Seashore Psychology Clinic with coursework and supervised research experience. Advanced students have opportunities to gain additional clinical experience through placement in the Benton Neuropsychology Clinic, Women's Wellness and Counseling Service, adult and child psychiatry clinics, the Iowa City VA Health Care System, and other venues.

### Cognition

The cognition training area is guided by the philosophy that understanding cognitive processes requires an understanding of how they develop and interact with other cognitive processes. In this pursuit, the area strives for empirical and theoretical rigor.

The area's laboratories have overlapping research domains, so most topics are studied by multiple laboratories with multiple methodologies. Areas of strength include categorization, computational modeling, cognitive control, cognitive development, language and language learning,

learning and memory, visual cognition, attention, and working memory.

Students in cognition take basic courses and seminars in specialty areas, but they devote most of their time to research activities. Students work closely with a faculty mentor at first and then become progressively independent as they gain knowledge and skills. The program encourages students to work with more than one faculty member, both in the program and across the department and the university. Students often combine basic work on cognition with work in areas such as neuroscience, neuropsychology, psychiatry, educational psychology, and human factors engineering.

## Individualized Graduate Training Option

The purpose of the individualized graduate training option is to provide flexibility to graduate students who want to pursue a specialized course of study that does not easily fit within the other three graduate training areas. This training option may also be appropriate for students who have strong interdisciplinary research interests involving coursework in other departments. Students can choose the individualized training option when applying to the PhD program or may petition the committee on graduate studies to switch to the individualized option after beginning the PhD program. Oversight of students in the individualized training option is provided by the student's research advisory committee, the director of graduate studies, and the committee on graduate studies.

## Admission

Since the graduate program in psychology is designed primarily for students seeking the PhD, all applicants are considered on that basis.

The application deadline is Dec. 1. Applications may be submitted at any time but are considered only once each year—between Dec. 1 and Feb. 1—for admission the following fall. Admission decisions are based on a composite consideration of prior academic and research performance, letters of reference, and an applicant's statement about background and purpose. Admission materials are reviewed initially by faculty members in the applicant's primary training area.

An undergraduate major in psychology—including a laboratory course in experimental psychology, a course in statistics, and additional work in the natural sciences and in mathematics—is desirable but not required. Students who have not had such a background but are strongly qualified on other grounds may be admitted. They may be asked to remedy deficiencies in background work with certain courses or independent study before embarking on the regular graduate program.

Applicants must meet the admission requirements of the Graduate College; see the Manual of Rules and Regulations on the Graduate College website.

## Career Advancement

Students who pursue a master's degree in psychology have many opportunities to teach psychology in community colleges or high schools or to find employment in a business, school, or hospital.

Learn more about careers in psychology at the American Psychological Association website.