Psychology, M.A.

Graduate study in psychology is designed for students seeking the Ph.D. degree. Students enrolled in the doctoral program may elect to receive a Master of Arts (M.A.) degree when they have completed the necessary requirements. Students from other University programs may seek an M.A. in psychology as a complement to other graduate or professional training.

Requirements

The Master of Arts program in psychology requires 30 s.h. of graduate credit with thesis, and 37 s.h. of graduate credit without thesis. Students must maintain a cumulative and program g.p.a. of at least 3.00 to earn the degree. The department ordinarily offers the M.A. only to students enrolled in the Ph.D. program.

Thesis students must earn 24 of the required 30 s.h. at the University of Iowa. Coursework for the thesis program must include a statistics course and at least an additional 8 s.h. earned in Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences courses and seminars, or in courses or seminars that meet area-specific requirements for one of the training areas. Thesis students also must complete an acceptable scholarly thesis and perform successfully in an oral defense of their thesis.

Nonthesis students must earn 30 of the required 37 s.h. at the University of Iowa. Coursework for the nonthesis program must include a statistics course and at least an additional 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. Nonthesis students also must perform successfully on an examination covering their area of specialization.

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 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 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 the 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 also may 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 Ph.D. program or may petition the Committee on Graduate Studies to switch to the individualized option after beginning the Ph.D. 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 Ph.D., all applicants are considered on that basis. Occasionally, a qualified applicant who is in good standing in another UI graduate program and is interested in advanced work in psychology only through the M.A. level may be admitted to pursue a combined graduate program. Students interested in such a program should contact the department chair before filing an application.

The application deadline is December 1. Applications may be submitted any time but are considered only once each year—between December 1 and February 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.