

THE FIELD

Psychology is the science that focuses on behavior and mental processes. The scope of psychology is extremely broad and the faculty members in the department reflect great diversity. The major areas of interest represented in the department are behavioral neuroscience, clinical psychology, cognition and cognitive neuroscience, developmental science, and social psychology.

A minor in psychology is available.

THE MAJOR

Students select psychology as a major for many reasons. Some wish to prepare themselves for graduate study and careers as professional psychologists, physicians, or lawyers. Others have general interests in fields such as social work and community mental health, or may wish to work with young children, adolescents, or the elderly. Many students aspire to careers in business and perceive the psychology major as a marketable background. Others derive great satisfaction from developing insights into human behavior and view the science of psychology as an important component of their liberal arts education.

The major consists of 40 credits in psychology courses. These include an introductory course; two methodology courses; four core courses chosen from a range of subjects including cognitive psychology, introduction to neuroscience, and developmental psychology; the Junior Year Writing requirement; an advanced departmental psychology laboratory course, departmental seminar, or designated departmental small course; the integrative experience; and at least two psychology elective courses numbered 200 and above.

PSYCHOLOGY/NEUROSCIENCE TRACK

The psychology/neuroscience track is an undergraduate program offered within the department that emphasizes the biological and neurological bases of human and animal behavior. This program is particularly suited for students planning a professional career in any field of neuroscience (e.g., neurobiology, neuropharmacology, behavioral neuroscience, or cognitive neuroscience) or individuals enrolled in pre-medical or pre-veterinary studies who are interested in neuroscience and behavior. The course requirements differ from the requirements of the general psychology major, as core psychology courses are supplemented with advanced electives and laboratory experience in neuroscience, as well as extensive natural science and mathematics courses. Students interested in this track should contact the neuroscience track advisor in the Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences.

SPECIALIZATION IN DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AND HUMAN SERVICES

The DDHS specialization offers undergraduates across disciplines the opportunity to obtain the skills needed for careers in the disability and broader human services field. A combination of coursework and internship experience prepares students to work with and support individuals with disabilities in a variety of settings, bringing a broad range of knowledge and skills to human service work and educational settings.

SPECIALIZATION IN PSYCHOLOGICAL MODELING

Psychological modeling is the practice of using mathematical equations and computer simulations to understand the psychological processes that support particular behaviors or mental abilities. Modeling techniques are becoming increasingly common across all fields of psychology, so gaining experience with these methods is critical for anyone who plans to pursue a career as a researcher. The specialization in psychological modeling consists of a one-semester seminar course and a research project completed across two semesters. Students who successfully complete the program will receive a letter of specialization that can be included in graduate school and job applications.

ADVANCING DIVERSITY IN RESEARCH AND PRACTICE (ADRAP)

ADRAP is a year-long program intended to promote diversity and the understanding of diversity in the field of psychology by 1) increasing the diversity (broadly defined) of the next generation of researchers and practitioners in psychology, and 2) fostering interest in research and practice with diverse populations. This program involves a one-year commitment that includes taking a two-semester weekly seminar and gaining practical experience in the field through a research assistantship or internship position. More details can be found on the ADRAP webpage: pbs.umass.edu/diversity/advancing-diversity-research-and-practice-undergraduate-program.

JOINT MAJOR IN PSYCHOLOGY AND LINGUISTICS

Students may also choose a joint major in psychology and linguistics. Contact the Department of Linguistics (umass.edu/linguist) for more information.

HONORS COURSES

The Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences tries to offer approximately four honors courses each semester. These are small classes (25 students) intended to be intensive learning experiences. Admission to psychology honors courses is generally restricted to declared honors students.

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

The psychology major also offers diverse research opportunities allowing students to participate in research, collect and analyze data, and prepare the findings for publication.

STUDY ABROAD

UMass Amherst offers a wide variety of international exchange and overseas study programs. Traditionally, psychology majors have been well represented in such programs, studying in various institutions in Great Britain, Japan, Germany, France, Israel, Italy, Australia, Spain, and Canada. Psychology majors must complete PSYCH 240 and PSYCH 241 prior to embarking on exchange. Contact the International Programs Office (413-545-2710, umass.edu/ipo) for information on available programs.

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

The undergraduate major in psychology is not a professional or vocational program that trains or prepares students for a specific job. However, a bachelor's degree will lead to employment possibilities in schools, hospitals, agencies, government, and business. To become a professional psychologist, a student must go on to graduate school. In most cases, this means earning a doctorate (approximately four years) or at least a master's degree (approximately two years). Psychology majors often enter graduate programs in related areas such as social work, gerontology, legal studies, or medical fields.

COLLEGE OF NATURAL SCIENCES

The College of Natural Sciences unites the life, environmental, computational, and physical sciences on campus. Students take advantage of a range of inquiry-based classroom and laboratory experiences, hands-on undergraduate research opportunities, multidisciplinary and cross-departmental education and research initiatives, and a variety of science student organizations. In addition, they are encouraged to develop strong written and oral communication skills, as well as leadership and problem-solving abilities.

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