

Psychological & Brain Sciences

The field of Psychology encompasses a large and diverse area of study that is empirical, theoretical, and practical. As the science concerned with the study of behavior, psychology includes such areas as: biological bases of behavior; brain-behavior interactions; learning; memory; cognition; motivation; sensation and perception; the study of social interactions, persuasion, and attitudes; aging and development; personality; clinical, abnormal, and health psychology; and leisure and work experiences. These areas may appear quite distinct from one another, but the study of one provides important implications and insights for the understanding of the others. As an example, knowledge of brain-behavior interactions, sensory processes, and learning processes all are involved in identifying, understanding, and treating certain psychopathologies. A major aspect of all the sub-disciplines is their emphasis on research and the development and expansion of knowledge concerning behavior.

An undergraduate education in psychology cannot hope to cover all aspects and areas of the discipline in a substantive way. At the very least, however, it should provide specific tools that allow the student of psychological thought to appraise knowledgeably the logic and evidence that underlie the ongoing evolution of psychological science. This is provided by either the major in Psychological & Brain Sciences or the major in Psychological & Brain Sciences: Cognitive Neuroscience.

Completion of either of the two Psychological & Brain Sciences majors, that is Psychological & Brain Sciences, or Psychological & Brain Sciences: Cognitive Neuroscience, should provide students with the content of psychology, including breadth and depth. It also should provide students with the tools needed to evaluate critically psychological information, independent of specific content.

The student needs to learn how to gather data, conduct literature reviews, and write proficiently and scientifically. Our curriculum aims to accomplish these goals. We strive to ensure that our students understand the importance and become critical evaluators of empirical psychological research.

Psychology is a multi-purpose, valuable discipline in which to major. It has relevance for those considering careers in law, medicine, the health professions, education, and business. In addition, it provides important skills and knowledge for those who may not be planning additional schooling.

The Department of Psychological & Brain Sciences at Washington University has particular strengths in the following areas:

- Aging
- Behavioral economics
- Human development
- Diversity science
- Cognitive neuroscience
- Emotion
- Judgment and decision-making

- Learning and operant conditioning
- Neuropsychology
- Personality and individual differences
- Adult psychopathology
- Sensory processes in vision and audition
- Social theories of self and social processes
- Human emotion

There are also many opportunities for undergraduates in this department:

- Research involvement with faculty members
- Supervised internships with community service agencies
- Practicum in Applied Behavior Analysis: Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Study abroad
- Specializations within the majors
- Senior honors
- Membership in Psi Chi, the national honor society in psychology

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