HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY, DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (PH.D.)

Program goal
The Doctor of Philosophy in Health Psychology offered by VCU is an experimentally oriented program that is designed to train students to contribute to the knowledge of psychological contributions to health and illness via training in basic and clinical research. Students completing the Ph.D. in Health Psychology will not be eligible for licensure. Research in health psychology examines the causes and development of illness, methods to help individuals develop healthy lifestyles to promote good health and prevent illness, the treatment individuals receive for their medical problems, the effectiveness with which individuals cope with and reduce stress and pain, biopsychosocial connections with immune functioning, and factors in the recovery, rehabilitation and psychosocial adjustment of patients with serious health problems. Thus, graduates from the Ph.D. program in Health Psychology are prepared for work in a range of settings including colleges and universities, medical centers, research centers, nonprofit agencies and local, state and national government.

The department maintains laboratory facilities for research in the areas of behavioral assessment, behavioral medicine, developmental, learning, behavioral pharmacology, psychophysiology, psychotherapy process, social perception, social influence and group dynamics. Opportunities for field research also are available in a variety of settings.

Student learning outcomes
1. Students will demonstrate understanding of the models, theories and processes of health psychology.
2. Students will demonstrate knowledge of the biological, cognitive, attitudinal, social and cultural underpinnings of health.
3. Students will demonstrate knowledge of primary and secondary prevention of disease in a diverse range of communities and populations.
4. Students will produce a rigorously designed research project in the field of health psychology.
5. Students will adhere to the highest standards of ethics in their research, teaching and applied practice.

VCU Graduate Bulletin, VCU Graduate School and general academic policies and regulations for all graduate students in all graduate programs
The VCU Graduate Bulletin website documents the official admission and academic rules and regulations that govern graduate education for all graduate programs at the university. These policies are established by the graduate faculty of the university through their elected representatives to the University Graduate Council.

It is the responsibility of all graduate students, both on- and off-campus, to be familiar with the VCU Graduate Bulletin as well as the Graduate School website (http://www.graduate.vcu.edu) and academic regulations in individual school and department publications and on program websites. However, in all cases, the official policies and procedures of the University Graduate Council, as published on the VCU Graduate Bulletin and Graduate School websites, take precedence over individual program policies and guidelines.

Visit the academic regulations section for additional information on academic regulations for graduate students. (http://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-reggs)

Degree candidacy requirements
A graduate student admitted to a program or concentration requiring a final research project, work of art, thesis or dissertation, must qualify for continuing master’s or doctoral status according to the degree candidacy requirements of the student’s graduate program. Admission to degree candidacy, if applicable, is a formal statement by the graduate student’s faculty regarding the student’s academic achievements and the student’s readiness to proceed to the final research phase of the degree program.

Graduate students and program directors should refer to the following degree candidacy policy as published in the VCU Graduate Bulletin for complete information and instructions.

Visit the academic regulations section for additional information on degree candidacy requirements. (http://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-reggs/grad/candidacy)

Graduation requirements
As graduate students approach the end of their academic programs and the final semester of matriculation, they must make formal application to graduate. No degrees will be conferred until the application to graduate has been finalized.

Graduate students and program directors should refer to the following graduation requirements as published in the Graduate Bulletin for a complete list of instructions and a graduation checklist.

Visit the academic regulations section for additional information on graduation requirements. (http://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-reggs/grad/grad/candidacy)

Apply online at graduate.admissions.vcu.edu (http://www.graduate.admissions.vcu.edu).

Admission requirements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree:</th>
<th>Semester(s) of entry:</th>
<th>Deadline dates:</th>
<th>Test requirements:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>Dec 1</td>
<td>GRE-General</td>
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</table>

In addition to the general admission requirements of the VCU Graduate School (http://bulletin.vcu.edu/graduate/study/admission-graduate-study/admission-requirements), the following requirements represent the minimum acceptable standards for admission:

1. Applicants must have graduated with a bachelor’s degree from an accredited college or university, but not necessarily with a major in psychology.
2. Applicants must present 18 semester hours of undergraduate course work in psychology. This is the minimal, but not optimal, number of hours for an applicant to be considered for admission. Included must be each of the following courses: general psychology, statistics and experimental psychology. Exceptionally well-qualified applicants with less than a major in psychology, or applicants whose undergraduate work is considered outdated by the admissions committee, may be
advised to complete some additional undergraduate courses at the beginning of their graduate study program.

3. Applicants must present an undergraduate record indicating superior academic potential.

4. Students must show proof of satisfactory performance on the GRE.

5. Three letters of recommendation from previous instructors are required.

6. A personal interview may be required at the discretion of the department.

The number of students who can be admitted is limited by the facilities and staff available. All applicants will be notified of the decision made. The screening process may begin as early as Jan. 1. First offers of admission are made by April 1. By June 1, after other offers to alternates have been made and final acceptances by students have been received, admissions may be closed.

Transfer credit hours for graduate work at other institutions will be evaluated after the completion of nine semester hours in the department.

**Degree requirements**

In addition to general VCU Graduate School graduation requirements (http://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-regs/grad/graduation-info), students are required to complete course work in core and elective courses and to conduct significant research. All work toward the Ph.D. degree must be completed within eight years of the first enrollment.

1. **Credit hour requirements:** Students in the health psychology Ph.D. program are required to earn a minimum of 80 graduate-level credit hours beyond the baccalaureate. At least one-half of the credit hours presented for graduation must be at the 600 level or higher.

2. **Grade requirement:** Receipt of a grade of C or lower in two courses, or grades of C or lower in more than six credit hours of psychology courses, constitutes automatic dismissal of a student from the program.

3. **Master’s-level candidacy and requirements:** All students in the Department of Psychology are required to complete a department core curriculum (13-15 credit hours) or its equivalent for students entering with a master’s degree. Students who receive a grade of C or lower in one of the department core courses must either (a) satisfactorily complete a re-examination of the material covered in the course within one semester following the receipt of the grade (this re-examination is to be arranged and evaluated by the course instructor) or (b) repeat the course for credit the next time it is offered and receive a grade of B or better. Regardless of which of these approaches is chosen, the students will be given only one opportunity to demonstrate that they have mastered the course material. Students who either fail the re-examination or repeat the course and receive a grade of C or lower will have failed the comprehensive examination and will be dismissed from the program. Additional courses and training experiences will be determined in consultation with and subject to the approval of the student’s faculty adviser and graduate program committee. All students are required to complete a master’s thesis and to defend it successfully in an oral examination. The successful proposal of the thesis will elevate the student to master’s degree candidacy status. Ideally the thesis should be publishable as a piece of research and make a contribution to the field of psychology. Students who have previously completed a master’s thesis in psychology at another university may have the thesis requirement waived if the thesis is accepted by their graduate program committee. The residence requirement for the master’s degree is 18 hours, nine in each of two consecutive semesters. Completion of the degree usually requires four semesters. At least six credit hours in PSYC 798 must be completed, and no more than six can be counted toward the M.S. degree.

4. **Doctoral candidacy and requirements:** Students are obligated to request, in writing from their program committees, continuation of study beyond the master’s degree and approval of their doctoral plan of study. Application from a student for continuation beyond the master’s level will be evaluated by the appropriate program committee after completion of all requirements for the master’s degree. The program committee reviews the student’s request and approves or disapproves the request. The student must pass a written preliminary examination to become a doctoral candidate. Students are required to complete this requirement prior to defense of their dissertations and prior to leaving on internship for students in the clinical and counseling psychology programs. With the consent of the program committee, doctoral students may design a minor consisting of courses in departments other than psychology or courses in an area of psychology other than the major. Both the clinical and counseling psychology programs require completion of applied practica and a one-year predoctoral internship approved by the program committee. Research practica are required by all programs. Practicum credit hours will vary depending on the program. Internship will be one-half credit hour per semester. A dissertation requiring the planning, completion and oral defense of an original research project is an integral part of the doctoral program. At least 12 credit hours in PSYC 898 must be completed, and no more than 12 can be counted toward the Ph.D. degree. Completion of the entire program usually requires four to six years (including the internship year for students in the clinical and counseling programs). Candidates must complete all requirements for the Ph.D. degree within an eight-year period from the date of admission to the graduate program unless permission is granted for an extension. In some cases, specific programs and divisions may have requirements in addition to those stated here.

A more detailed description of the requirements for each of the graduate programs is included in the Department of Psychology’s Graduate Student Handbook, which is provided to each incoming graduate student. Visit the website for more information: psychology.vcu.edu (http://www.psychology.vcu.edu).

**Curriculum requirements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Hours</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Department core courses</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>PSYC 619</td>
<td>Learning and Cognition ¹</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSYC 629</td>
<td>Biological Basis of Behavior ¹</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSYC 673</td>
<td>Topics in Diversity I ¹</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSYC 674</td>
<td>Topics in Diversity II ¹</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSYC 680</td>
<td>Statistics in Psychological Research I ¹</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSYC 681</td>
<td>Statistics in Psychological Research II ¹</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible conduct of research course (select one)</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OVPR 601</td>
<td>Scientific Integrity</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>or OVPR 602</td>
<td>Responsible Scientific Conduct</td>
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<tr>
<td>or OVPR 603</td>
<td>Responsible Conduct of Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>or PSYC 675</td>
<td>Ethical Principles of Psychology</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Required health courses</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>PSYC 660</td>
<td>Health Psychology ¹</td>
<td>3</td>
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¹ denotes courses that are required for the Ph.D. degree.
PSYC 679  Culture, Ethnicity and Health  3
PSYC 691  Special Topics (research methods in health psychology or approved equivalent)  3

**Applied course**

PSYC 631  Evaluation Research: Psychological Perspectives  3
or PSYC 655  Community Interventions: Development, Implementation and Evaluation

**Additional health-related courses**

Select six credits from the following:  6

EPID 603  Public Health Policy and Politics
HADM 615  Health Care Politics and Policy
PHTX 548  Drug Dependence
PSYC 622  Physiological Correlates of Emotion
PSYC 635  Psychology of Health and Health Care in the Elderly
PSYC 666  Crisis Intervention: Theory, Research and Practice
PSYC 691  Special Topics (child health psychology, cancer prevention and control, occupational health psychology, tobacco control in 21st century)
SBHD 608  Health Communication

**Independent readings and research**  1,2

PSYC 671  Readings and Research  3
PSYC 690  Research Practicum  3

**Additional course work**

ALHP 716  Grant Writing and Project Management in Health Related Sciences  3
or PSYC 700  Grant Writing
PSYC 603  Developmental Processes (or another course in developmental psychology approved by the program director)  3
PSYC 630  Social Psychology (or another course in social psychology approved by the program director)  3
PSYC 795  Practicum in the Teaching of College Psychology  3

**Methodology/statistics course**

Select at least one of the following:  3

BIOS 531  Clinical Epidemiology
BIOS 571  Clinical Trials
BIOS 572  Analysis of Biomedical Data I
BIOS 647  Survival Analysis
EDUS 651  Topics in Education
EPID 571  Principles of Epidemiology
EPID 606  Epidemiologic Methods
HADM 762  Health Services Research Methods II
MGMT 691  Topics in Management (CARMA)
NURS 772  Qualitative Research
PSYC 682  Advanced Multivariate Methods in Psychology
PSYC 683  Multilevel Modeling

PSYC 702  Causal Analysis for Organizational Studies
SBHD 610  Behavioral Measurement
SBHD 633  Structural Equation Modeling
SCMA 643  Applied Multivariate Methods
SOCY/PADM 605  Survey Research Methods
SWKD 704  Multiparadigmatic Qualitative Methods and Analysis

**Recommended electives**

Select seven to eight credit hours from the following:  7-8

ALHP 701  Health Services Delivery Systems
BIOL 524  Endocrinology
EPID 603  Public Health Policy and Politics
GRTY 601  Biological and Physiological Aging
GRTY 627  Psychology of Health and Health Care for the Elderly
HADM 615  Health Care Politics and Policy
HADM 626  International Health
PHTX 548  Drug Dependence
PHTX 614  Foundation in Psychoneuroimmunology
PSYC 622  Physiological Correlates of Emotion
PSYC 635  Psychology of Health and Health Care in the Elderly
PSYC 666  Crisis Intervention: Theory, Research and Practice
PSYC 691  Special Topics (child health psychology, cancer prevention and control, occupational health psychology, tobacco control in 21st century)
SBHD 605  Introduction to Social and Behavioral Health
SBHD 608  Health Communication
SBHD 630  Theoretical Foundations of Social and Behavioral Health

**Thesis/dissertation**

PSYC 798  M.S. Thesis  6
PSYC 898  Doctoral Dissertation  12

Total Hours  80

1 Required course for M.S. degree (40 credit hours minimum)
2 At least three credit hours of either course required for M.S.; both required for Ph.D.

**Total graduate credit hours required (minimum) 80**

**Graduate program director**
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Program website: psychology.vcu.edu/health (http://www.psychology.vcu.edu/health/index.shtml)