

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 an understanding of the broad field of psychology.
2. Students will demonstrate their understanding of the models, theories and processes of health psychology.
3. Students will demonstrate knowledge of the biological, cognitive, attitudinal, social and cultural underpinnings of health.
4. Students will demonstrate knowledge of primary and secondary prevention of disease in a diverse range of communities and populations.
5. Students will use scientifically sound research methodologies, univariate and multivariate statistics and ethical practices in their conduct of research.
6. Students will adhere to the highest standards of ethics in their research, teaching and applied practice. Students will follow standards set by the university and the American Psychological Association.

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. (<https://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-regs/>)

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. (<https://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-regs/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. (<https://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-regs/grad/graduation-info/>)

Apply online today. (<https://www.vcu.edu/admissions/apply/graduate/>)

Admission requirements

Degree:	Semester(s) of entry:	Deadline dates:	Test requirements:
Ph.D.	Fall	Jan 10	

In addition to the general admission requirements of the VCU Graduate School (<https://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. Three letters of recommendation from previous instructors are required.
5. A personal interview may be required at the discretion of the department.

Please note the health psychology program does not require the GRE for admission and does not consider GRE scores in admission decisions.

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 Feb. 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 (<https://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 (17 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

Course	Title	Hours
Department core courses		
PSYC 619	Learning and Cognition ¹	3
PSYC 629	Biological Basis of Behavior ¹	3
PSYC 673	Diversity Dialogues ¹	2
PSYC 680	Statistics in Psychological Research I ¹	3
PSYC 681	Statistics in Psychological Research II ¹	3
PSYC 684	Research Methods in Psychology ¹	3
Required health courses		
OVPR 601	Scientific Integrity ¹	1
or OVPR 602	Responsible Scientific Conduct	
or OVPR 603	Responsible Conduct of Research	

or PSYC 675	Ethical Principles of Psychology	
PSYC 660	Health Psychology ¹	3
PSYC 679	Culture, Ethnicity and Health	3
Applied course ¹		
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 601		
EPID 603		
GRTY 601	Biological and Physiological Aging	
HADM 615	Health Care Politics and Policy	
HCPR 601	Introduction to Health Policy	
HCPR 703	Health Economics: Theory and Principles	
HEMS 640	Health Care Organization and Delivery in the U.S.	
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	
SOCY 645	The Sociology of Health and Illness	
Independent readings and research ^{1,2}		
PSYC 671	Readings and Research	3
PSYC 690	Research Practicum	3
Additional course work		
ALHP 716	Grant Writing for Health Science Research	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 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	Introduction to Qualitative Methods	
Recommended electives		
Select seven to eight credit hours from the following:		7-8
ALHP 701	Health Services Delivery Systems	
BIOL 524	Endocrinology	
EPID 603		
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 671	Readings and Research	
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 ¹	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.

The minimum number of graduate credit hours required for this degree is 80.**Contact**

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Program website: <https://psychology.vcu.edu/graduate/phd-in-health-psychology/>