

Psychology - Human Development & Public Policy, PHD

Modality

On Campus

Program URL

<https://psychology.georgetown.edu/graduate-program/our-program/>

Mission Statement or Program Description

The Ph.D. program in Psychology offers a fully funded five-year, full-time program of study. Students who select the Human Development & Public Policy concentration have the option to earn a Master of Public Policy degree from the McCourt School of Public Policy.

Program requirements are designed to offer students rigorous training in the theories and methods that characterize the psychological sciences and enable them to place the study of development and neuroscience into the broader contexts –biological, familial, social, cultural, economic, historical, political—from which the field draws its societal applications. All entering Ph.D. students select a primary mentor or mentors with whom to conduct research. Faculty research ranges from studies of learning, cognition, emotion, and social behavior at specific stages of childhood and adolescence to the study of neural and physiological mechanisms supporting these and other processes throughout the lifespan.

Academic Policies

The academic policies and procedures of the joint program in Psychology and Public Policy are those specified in the department handbook and the University Bulletin.

Requirements

Plan of Study

The coursework distribution is as follows:

Course	Title	Credits
Fall I		
PSYC 5001	Lifespan Dev:Brain & Cognition	3
PPOL 5000	Stat Meth for Policy Analysis	3
PPOL 5006	The Politics of Policy-Making	3
PPOL 5004	Intermediate Microeconomics	3
Credits		12
Spring I		
PSYC 4810	Child & Family Policy	3
PPOL 5001	Reg. Meth. for Policy Analysis	3
PPOL 5010	Ethics/Values/Public Policy	3
PPOL 5005	Microecon II:Mkt Fail Pub Econ	3
Credits		12

Fall II		
PSYC 5002	Human Development in Context	3
PPOL 5002	Adv Regression/Prog Eval Meth	3
PPOL 5008	Public Management	3
PPOL 5013	Thesis Workshop	3
Credits		12
Spring II		
3 Electives		9
PPOL 5014	Thesis Workshop II	3
Credits		12
Total Credits		48

Required Examinations

For the Ph.D., students must complete two research projects and an area paper prior to advancing to candidacy.

First Year Research Project

During the student's first year in the program, intensive research experience with the mentor will result in a first-year research project. This project is likely to be part of an ongoing project in the mentor's lab, but students are welcome to conduct original research, including original secondary analyses of existing datasets, subject to the approval of their mentor(s). This project is designed to ensure that students rapidly gain experience conducting research and presenting their results. Students are required to present this research at Graduate Lunch in their second year. They are also required to submit this project as a conference presentation (poster or talk).

Second Year Research Project

The second-year project is an independent research project conducted under the supervision of the mentor(s). In contrast to the first-year research project, which is likely to be an offshoot of faculty research, this project is intended to be an independent research project designed and conducted by the graduate student. This project may grow out of the first-year project, or it may be separate.

Students are required to present their second-year project during Graduate Lunch in their third year. Students are also required to submit this project as a presentation (poster or talk) at a conference by the summer after their second year.

Finally, students are required to submit their first-year project and/or second-year project to a peer-reviewed journal. This submission should occur no later than the fall semester of their third year (but preferably the preceding summer). Writing and submitting a journal article requires students to conduct a more sophisticated review of the literature, data analysis, and interpretation of their results than does preparing a poster or talk. In many cases, first- and/or second-year projects also provide pilot data for inclusion in the pre-doctoral research proposal.

Area Paper (Third Year)

The Area Paper is a written review of the theoretical and empirical literature on the student's planned dissertation topic, written in the style of a scholarly review article (e.g., Psychological Bulletin or TICS). Ideally, it should serve as a preamble to the dissertation proposal by identifying gaps in the literature the dissertation would aim to fill. The Area Paper can be a meta-analysis, and thus empirical, of a particular research question; however, the paper must still contain sufficient

theoretical and empirical background to provide the committee a thorough grounding in the relevant literature.

Students select an Area Paper committee with a minimum of three members; at least two of whom are members of the Department of Psychology, and the third of whom can be a member of the Department or external to the Department. (Usually, this committee comprises 3 of the 4 committee members for the student's dissertation). Students then must schedule an oral defense in consultation with the committee members. Students submit the written Area Paper to the committee no less than one week in advance of the oral defense. The oral defense involves an approximately 45-minute presentation by the student followed by an exam (questions from the committee). The oral exam also provides an opportunity for students and their committee to reflect on the student's first two years of study, preliminary plans for their dissertation, and career plans. The area paper and its oral defense serve as the Ph.D. Qualifying Examination. Upon its successful complete, the committee completes the Qualifying/ Comprehensive Examination Report Form, collects the signatures of the committee, and delivers it to the Registrar. The student should request that the Psychology Department administrator send the committee members the correct form.

Successful completion of coursework and the defense of the Area Paper advances the student to Doctoral Candidacy.

Thesis Requirements

Master of Public Policy

Students choose between two capstone experiences: completing a thesis, or completing a client-based capstone. Both options span two semesters, and involve answering a policy question in an analytically rigorous manner, drawing on the knowledge and skills of the MPP curriculum.

Students who choose the thesis capstone option will develop a research question and work with their advisor to formulate and implement a research plan. Students who choose the client-based capstone option will work with a small group of fellow students to study a real policy problem for an actual organization.

Doctor of Philosophy

In consultation with their mentor(s), students must identify a four-member dissertation committee. The committee must consist of three Georgetown University faculty plus one external reader. The three Georgetown University faculty include the primary mentor(s), and at least two of the three must be members of the Department of Psychology. The external reader must be faculty from another institution (although they may be affiliated with Georgetown University) who is an expert in the topic of the dissertation.

The dissertation is a description of original research conducted by the student during their 4th and 5th years in the program (although data collection or analysis may have begun earlier). The dissertation is required to be the original work of the student, rather than being derivative of previous research, although the dissertation can be part of a larger project directed by the mentor(s). The dissertation must contain at least one publishable set of findings, which is to say findings that make an original, empirical contribution to the field and thus advance knowledge. Ideally, one or more studies that compose the dissertation will have been submitted for publication by the time of the defense. Dissertations in the Psychology Department typically follow

the "three paper" format, consisting of several (usually three) stand-alone but interrelated papers, each suitable for publication in a peer-reviewed journal. Accordingly, the dissertation should be written in the format of a series of journal articles suitable for submission to a peer-reviewed journal. Each article represents a chapter in the dissertation, which will also include separate introductory and concluding chapters.

For the dissertation defense, students (Ph.D. candidates) present their research to the committee in the format of a 45-minute research colloquium. In addition to the committee (who may attend virtually or in-person) Psychology Department faculty and graduate students are encouraged to attend, as are friends and family of the candidate and members of the wider Georgetown community. Following the research presentation, audience members are invited to ask questions. Following this open question period, the candidate and committee go into a closed session during which the members of the committee question the candidate. At the end of questioning, the candidate leaves the room while the committee comes to a conclusion about the status of the dissertation. The candidate is then invited to return and informed of the committee's decision.