

Psychology - Lifespan Cognitive Neuroscience, 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 – Lifespan Cognitive Neuroscience offers a fully funded five-year, full-time program of study.

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 Psychology program are those specified in the department handbook and Georgetown University's Bulletin.

Requirements

Program Requirements

All doctoral students must complete the following general requirements:

- Complete 48 credits of coursework with a cumulative GPA of 3.000.
- Serve as a Teaching Fellow or an instructor of record in undergraduate courses each semester.
- Attend weekly graduate lunches. Beginning in the second year, students are required to present annually at one graduate lunch.
- Attend the Psychology Department Colloquia, held on the first Friday of each month.
- Submit at least one proposal for pre-doctoral funding or dissertation funding during their time in the program.

Plan of Study

Students are required to complete 39 credits to fulfill the degree requirements distributed as follows:

Course	Title	Credits
Summer I		
NSCI 8001	Experiences in Neuroscience	0
PSYC 9999	Thesis Research-Psychology	0
Credits		0
Fall I		
PSYC 5001	Lifespan Dev:Brain & Cognition	3
NSCI 5002	Cellular & Molecular Neurosci	6
NSCI 5003	Neurosci Critical Readings	1
Credits		10
Spring I		
NSCI 5005	Systems & Cognitive Neurosci	6
NSCI 5006	Critical Readings II	1
NSCI 5008	Org of the Nervous System	1-2
NSCI 5007	Surv Skills & Ethics for Scien	2
Credits		10-11
Fall II		
PSYC 5002	Human Development in Context	3
PSYC 5004	Quant Methods in Psychology	3
1 Elective		3
Credits		9
Spring II		
PSYC 5005	Quant Methods in Psyc II	3
PSYC 5003	Cognitive Neuroscience	3
1 Elective		3
Credits		9
Total Credits		38-39

Required Examinations

In lieu of a formal Qualifying Examination, 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 completion, 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

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 concludes about the status of the dissertation. The candidate is then invited to return and informed of the committee's decision.