

Psychology is both an applied and academic field that studies the human mind and behavior. Research in psychology seeks to understand and explain thought, emotion and behavior. Applications of psychology include mental health treatment, performance enhancement, self-help, ergonomics and many other areas affecting health and daily life.

Psychology evolved out of both philosophy and biology. Such discussions of the two subjects date as far back as the early Greek thinkers such as Aristotle and Socrates. The word psychology is derived from the Greek word *psyche*, meaning 'soul' or 'mind.'

A Separate Science

The field and study of psychology was truly born when Wilhelm Wundt established the first psychology lab in Leipzig, Germany.

Wundt's research utilized a school of thought known as structuralism, which involved describing the structures that compose the mind. This perspective relied heavily on the analysis of sensations and feelings through the use of introspection, a highly subjective process. Wundt believed that properly trained individuals would be able to accurately identify the mental processes that accompanied feelings, sensations and thoughts.

Schools of Thought

Throughout psychology's history, a number of different schools of thought have formed to explain human thought and behavior. These schools of thought often rise to dominance for a period of time. While these schools of thought are sometimes perceived as competing forces, each perspective has contributed to our understanding of psychology. The following are some of the major schools of thought in psychology.

- Structuralism
- Functionalism
- Psychoanalysis
- Behaviorism
- Humanism
- Cognitivism

Psychology Today

Today, psychologists prefer to use more objective scientific methods to understand, explain, and predict human behavior. Psychological studies are highly structured, beginning with a hypothesis that is then empirically tested. Psychology has two major areas of focus: academic psychology and applied psychology. Academic psychology focuses on the study of different sub-topics within psychology including personality psychology, social psychology and developmental psychology.

These psychologists conduct basic research that seeks to expand our theoretical knowledge, while other researchers conduct applied research that seeks to solve everyday problems. Applied psychology focuses on the use of different psychological principles to solve real world problems. Examples of applied areas of psychology include forensic psychology, ergonomics, and industrial-organizational psychology. Many other psychologists work as therapists, helping people overcome mental, behavioral and emotional disorders.

Psychology Research Methods

As psychology moved away from its philosophical roots, psychologists began to employ more and more scientific methods to study human behavior. Today, researchers employ a variety of scientific methods, including experiments, correlational studies, longitudinal studies and others to test, explain and predict behavior.

Areas of Psychology

- **Abnormal Psychology**: Abnormal psychology is a field of psychology that deals with psychopathology and abnormal behavior. The term covers a broad range of disorders, from depression to obsession-compulsion to sexual deviation and many more. Counselors, clinical psychologists and psychotherapists often work directly in this field.
- **Biopsychology**: Biopsychology is a field of psychology that analyzes how the brain and neurotransmitters influence our behaviors, thoughts and feelings. This field can be thought of as a combination of basic psychology and neuroscience.
- **Clinical Psychology**: Clinical psychology is the branch of psychology concerned with the assessment and treatment of mental illness, abnormal behavior and psychiatric problems.
- **Cognitive Psychology**: Cognitive psychology is the branch of psychology that studies mental processes including how people think, perceive, remember and learn. As part of the larger field of cognitive science, this branch of psychology is related to other disciplines including neuroscience, philosophy, and linguistics.
- **Comparative Psychology**: Comparative psychology is the branch of psychology concerned with the study of animal behavior. Modern research on animal behavior began with the work of Charles Darwin and Georges Romanes and has continued to grow into a multidisciplinary subject. Today, biologists, psychologists, anthropologists, ecologists, geneticists and many others contribute to the study of animal behavior.
- **Counseling Psychology**: Counseling psychology focuses on providing therapeutic treatments to clients who experience a wide variety of symptoms. It is also one of the largest specialty areas within psychology. The Society of Counseling Psychology describes the field as "a psychological specialty [that] facilitates personal and interpersonal functioning across the life span with a focus on emotional, social, vocational, educational, health-related, developmental and organizational concerns."
- **Developmental Psychology**: This branch of psychology looks at development throughout the lifespan, from childhood to adulthood. The scientific study of human development seeks to understand and explain how and why people change throughout life. This includes all aspects of human growth, including physical, emotional, intellectual, social, perceptual and personality development. Topics studied in this field include everything from prenatal development to Alzheimer's disease.
- **Educational Psychology**: Educational psychology involves the study of how people learn, including topics such as student outcomes, the instructional process, individual differences in learning, gifted learners and learning disabilities.

- **Experimental Psychology:** Experimental psychology is an area of psychology that utilizes scientific methods to research the mind and behavior. Experimental psychologists work in a wide variety of settings including colleges, universities, research centers, government and private businesses.
- **Forensic Psychology:** Forensic psychology is defined as the intersection of psychology and the law, but forensic psychologists can perform many roles so this definition can vary. In many cases, people working within forensic psychology are not necessarily "forensic psychologists." These individuals might be clinical psychologists, school psychologists, neurologists or counselors who lend their psychological expertise to provide testimony, analysis or recommendations in legal or criminal cases.
- **Health Psychology:** The field of health psychology is focused on promoting health as well as the prevention and treatment of disease and illness. Health psychologists also focus on understanding how people react, cope and recover from illness. Some health psychologists work to improve the health care system and the government's approach to health care policy.
- **Human Factors Psychology:** Human factors is an area of psychology that focuses on a range of different topics, including ergonomics, workplace safety, human error, product design, human capability and human-computer interaction. In fact, the terms human factors and ergonomics are often used synonymously, with human factors being commonly used in the United States and ergonomics in Europe.
- **Industrial-Organizational Psychology:** Industrial organizational psychology is a field of psychology that applies psychological theories and principles to organizations. This field focuses on increasing workplace productivity and related issues such as the physical and mental well being of employees. Industrial organizational psychologists perform a wide variety of tasks, including studying worker attitudes and behavior, evaluating companies and conducting leadership training.
- **Personality Psychology:** Personality psychology looks at the patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behavior that make a person unique. Some of the best-known theories in psychology have originated in this field, including Freud's psychoanalytic theory of personality and Erikson's theory of psychosocial development.
- **School Psychology:** School psychology is a field that works within the educational system to help children with emotional, social and academic issues. The goal of school psychology is to collaborate with parents, teachers, and students to promote a healthy learning environment that focuses on the needs of children.
- **Social Psychology:** Social psychology looks at a wide range of social topics, including group behavior, social perception, leadership, nonverbal behavior, conformity, aggression and prejudice. It is important to note that social psychology is not just about looking at social influences. Social perception and social interaction are also vital to understanding social behavior.

- **Sports Psychology:** Sports psychology is the study of how psychology influences sports, athletic performance, exercise and physical activity. Some sports psychologists work with professional athletes and coaches to improve performance and increase motivation. Other professionals utilize exercise and sports to enhance people's lives and well-being throughout the entire lifespan.

As a psychology student, you will need to take a number of courses that focus on the science of human behavior. **Your goal as a student is** not only to fulfill the course requirements of your program department, but to also **develop CRITICAL thinking skills**, research competence and in-depth knowledge of psychology that will serve you well as you advance in your academic and career pursuits.

The following are some of the top courses from your studies

1. General Psychology



This introductory course offers an overview of the entire field of psychology. It may seem overwhelming at first, due to the sheer volume of information contained within class. Remember, however, that the goal of this class is to provide an introduction to the history of psychology and the scientific study of the human mind and behavior.

2. History of Psychology



In order to understand contemporary psychology, it is important to look back at the origins and influences on this science. Courses on the history of psychology generally begin with the subject's ancient philosophical origins and explore the contributions of major thinkers up through the modern day.

3. Statistics



Statistics courses are a must for any psychology major, whether or not you plan to pursue a graduate degree later on. Statistics offers a core background for understanding how psychologists investigate human behavior. This course generally focuses on statistical methods and techniques used by researchers. According to one survey, 85 percent of psychology graduate programs require at least one undergraduate course in statistics in order to gain admission to the program.

4. Experimental Psychology



A course in experimental psychology is an essential foundation for any psychology major. In this course, you will learn about basic research methods and experimental designs. While course

requirements may vary from one school to the next, most experimental psychology courses require students to perform experiments.

5. Physiological Psychology



- In order to form a full understanding of the mind and behavior, it is important to develop your knowledge of the brain, neural actions, sensation and perception, basic neuroanatomy and physiological processes.

6. Cognitive Psychology



In this course, you will learn more about the cognitive process that form the foundation of human behavior. Topics covered include thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, language, judgment, attention, memory and information processing.

7. Abnormal Psychology



Courses in abnormal psychology focus on the biological, environmental and cultural influences on abnormal behavior. Some of the topics studied in this course might include mood disorders, personality disorders, psychosomatic disorders and substance abuse. In addition to exploring the background, assessment and diagnosis of these disorders, students also explore some of the available treatment approaches.

8. Developmental Psychology



Developmental psychology courses study the course of human development from conception throughout the lifespan. In some cases, students may opt to take an encompassing course that provides an overview of development through life or choose to take a course that focuses primarily on child development. Developmental psychology courses generally look at developmental changes in biological, emotional and cognitive domains, as well as looking at how factors such as family, school, peers and culture impact this growth.

9. Social Psychology



Social psychology courses are focused on the scientific study of social influences on behavior and the interaction between individuals and groups. Topics studied in this class include such

things as social pressure, leadership, nonverbal communication, persuasion, obedience and the bystander effect.

10. Personality Psychology



A course in personality psychology offers a solid background in the numerous theories of personality development, including Freudian, psychosocial, behavioral, humanistic and existential theories.