

# UNDERGRADUATE PSYCHOLOGY at KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

If you are thinking about a college Psychology major, what do you need to know about Kent State University's program? Here is a brief description.

## WHAT IS PSYCHOLOGY?

Psychology is the study of behavior and mental processes, plus the application of that knowledge to real-life problems. Studying Psychology mostly means studying what makes people tick -- who we really are and why we do the things we do. One example of a question that a psychologist might investigate is how does memory work? This might seem a sort of exotic question, but think about it. Can memory be fooled, tricked into storing things that never happened? Can memories be repressed -- that is blocked from consciousness? Questions like these are basic to understanding topics from mental illness to eyewitness testimony in the courts.

There are literally hundreds of other such issues, issues such as which counseling techniques really work, what the basic types of personality are, what things are crucial in child development, how the brain really operates, what determines who likes (or dislikes) whom, how to understand animals, what motivates people to perform at their best. Psychology relates to nearly everything.

## WHAT DOES KENT STATE OFFER TO PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS?

It is possible to sum this up pretty briefly:

**Highly expert faculty.** Faculty expertise covers a wide variety of specialties within Psychology -- from schizophrenia, to parenting, to brain function, to forensic psychology, to health psychology, to memory processes, and too many more to list. Furthermore, our faculty members are *genuine* experts; many are nationally and internationally known for the excellence of their work. (The Department also has a strong graduate program, and the graduate students are very important resources for undergraduates.)

**A flexible major.** The Psychology major is designed to let students pursue individualized courses of study. It gives students many choices among Psychology courses and also provides time to add courses from other fields.

**Detailed advising.** Advising is especially important for Psychology majors because they have many choices and many ways to use their college experiences. We have a multi-source advising program in which majors can get advising information through both advising documents and individual faculty advisors. This makes it easy for students to get the information and individual help they need.

**Opportunities for research experience.** Many students want research experience as a way to stand out from the crowd. This can be helpful for many types of jobs, and it can be crucial for students who plan on certain types of graduate school. We provide numerous opportunities for research involvement, and in-depth involvement at that. It is not terribly unusual, for example, for undergraduates to be co-authors on presentations at Psychology meetings around the country.

**The resources of a major university.** Almost no matter what you want to combine with your Psychology training, Kent State will have it -- courses in criminal justice, computer information systems, primate behavior, architecture, human resource management, Pan-African studies, consumer and family studies, and so on, and on, and on.

In what follows, you will see in somewhat more detail how these features of the program can help you make the most of your college career.

## THE PSYCHOLOGY MAJOR AT KENT STATE

Psychology majors take courses from a broad range of disciplines as part of their general liberal arts preparation. In the major itself, all students take several courses designed to give them an introduction to the field and a background in the basics of psychological inquiry -- how Psychology asks and answers questions about behavior and mental processes. In addition, students choose from a menu of courses designed to give them breadth in their exposure to the field (for instance, majors choose between Child Psychology and the Psychology of Adjustment). Finally there are elective Psychology credits, which majors can use to fine-tune their preparation and begin to specialize if they wish.

The minimum requirements for the Psychology major are low -- a total of 30-32 credit hours. As suggested above, this is to allow students to combine Psychology with other fields if that fits their goals and interests. Psychology can be combined with course work in a wide variety of fields to enhance the fit between your college curriculum and your individual interests. Many students take advantage of this flexibility. They combine their Psychology work with experience in anthropology, business administration, biology, pre-medicine, women's studies, sociology, justice studies, pre-law, computer science, or any one of many other disciplines. Even their choices of general requirements courses can assist in their preparation -- in the humanities and fine arts, for example, logic and speech may be helpful for many students. Faculty advisors in the Psychology Department can help students decide what courses are most important for them. Of course, some students do not need to incorporate large numbers of courses from outside fields into their curriculum. They may need only a very general degree or may just need to concentrate very strongly in Psychology itself.

## WHAT CAN I DO WITH PSYCHOLOGY?

Psychology is not for everyone, but studying Psychology can equip students with ways to approach a wide variety of situations and human problems. Thus Psychology can serve as a basis for many types of careers. Of course, this range of possibilities means that Psychology majors need to think as carefully as possible about what their individual interests and goals are.

One important distinction is between careers that require advanced training (a master's degree or doctoral degree) and those that do not. You do things a little bit differently depending on whether or not you are planning on attending graduate school. As a matter of fact, whether you are planning on advanced training or not, you should think about your college career in terms of what your longer-term plans are. Advising is very important, and as noted above, we provide several ways for you to get the information you need.

**With a Bachelor's Degree:** One book put out by the American Psychological Association listed about 300 sorts of jobs suited to people with B.A.'s in Psychology, so there is no shortage of possibilities. Others have published similar lists. When you sort through them all, they seem to break down into several categories:

- **Human Services** -- Counselor, group home coordinator, youth worker, case manager, community advocate, etc.
- **Business/organizational** -- General management, marketing, customer relations, human resources, etc.
- **Technical** -- Data analyst, research technician, animal care technician, technical writer, research administration, etc.

You prepare for various careers by selecting courses and outside-the-classroom experiences that will give you needed skills and look good to prospective employers. Additionally, you use faculty

advising to help you tie it all together. In general, though, you can say that when employers think about hiring Psychology majors, they are looking for (1) people skills, (2) problem-solving skills, and (3) knowledge of basic psychological principles.

**With an Advanced Degree:** There are as many possibilities for Psychology majors who go on for graduate degrees as there are for persons who stop with their B.A.degree. Of course, careers that require advanced training will usually pay more, at least in the beginning.

What do you need to think about when you consider graduate school? First, ask yourself what *kind* of graduate training you want -- what type of training and at what level. Psychology majors can go on further in Psychology, of course, but they can also go into graduate programs in school psychology, counseling, human resources, business, law, medicine, and many other fields. Furthermore, many of these options can be pursued at either the master's degree level or at the doctoral level. To make real choices among all of these options, and to get the best preparation for the particular areas you are interested in, you will probably need intensive advising (see below).

### **HOW DO I CHOOSE A PATH AND PREPARE MYSELF FOR IT?**

This is where you have to think about your individual interests and talents. If you are pretty sure what you want, you can shape your undergraduate training to give you the best preparation. If you wish to keep several options open, it is usually still possible to select a course of study that will balance everything out. A few students manage to do this pretty much on their own, but most will need some serious advising from the Department. (You can think of this document as a first step in advising, in fact.) The tools you use to fine-tune your course of study include your choices of Psychology courses (who needs to take Psychological Interventions?), your choices of courses outside Psychology (who needs Political Science?), and your out-of-class experiences (who needs research experience or community volunteer experience?).

Advising is critical for making the most of your degree. (Notice how often we mention advising!) As we have seen, Psychology is not a one-track major. It's much more flexible than that, and students can tailor courses of study for a huge variety of interests and goals. Once you know what to think about, you have started the process. Getting advising from the Psychology Department is very helpful. Let's face it, a Psychology major who wants to go into counseling is not going to need exactly the same courses and experiences as one who wants to go into animal training. And neither of them will need the same things as students interested in forensic psychology, or business careers or personality testing.

The Department of Psychology's multi-source advising program is designed to make it as easy as possible for you to get the information you need. There is, first of all, your personal Psychology Faculty Advisor. You pick your Advisor when you officially declare the major. Your Psychology Faculty Advisor should be able to assist you in sorting out what types of things you would really like to do. Certainly, your Advisor will be able to help you figure out what courses and experiences will be most useful for you. Psychology majors should get a Faculty Advisor early in their college career and start working on a plan for their course of study.

In addition, the Psychology Department makes several helpful documents available to majors on our website (<http://dept.kent.edu/psychology/UG/undergrd.htm> ). These are designed to help students get basic information about the major and to help students start their planning. For example, there is a brochure on, "*Courses for Psychology Majors*", which details every Psychology course and when it might be useful. Other materials concern employment opportunities for bachelor's degree students and provide detailed information on preparing for graduate study for those who wish to consider advanced training.

To sum it up, we are dedicated to helping our students get the type of college education they really need.

Those interested in additional information about Kent's Undergraduate Psychology Program can contact

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