Proposal for Departmental Honors Track in Psychology

Overview

The Psychology Department Honors Program offers students a rigorous, research-oriented curriculum with which to pursue their Bachelors degree in Psychology at the University of Utah. The centerpiece of the Psychology Honors Program is a research project culminating in the submission of a written thesis and its presentation in a public forum, typically a poster session.

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Requirements

The Psychology Honors Program is intended to be flexible and accessible to all interested and eligible students, including transfer students. To receive a Bachelor’s in Psychology with Departmental Honors, students must meet each of the following requirements:

- Meet all University and Departmental requirements for a Bachelor’s degree in Psychology.
- Maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.5 overall, a minimum grade of B in all Psychology courses, and a cumulative GPA of 3.5 in all Psychology courses.
- Complete 6 units (typically 2 semesters) of Research Experience (Psy 4800-4806) in laboratories approved by the Psychology Honors Advisory Committee.
- Complete at least an additional 9 units of Psychology Honors electives (see Table 1).
- Complete 6 units of honors thesis coursework (3 units of Psy 4998 Senior Thesis and 3 units of Psy 4999: Honors Thesis/project).
- Submit a written thesis discussing the results of their research project. The format of the Honors thesis should be consistent with standard scholarly practice (i.e., Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion, and References Cited, following APA style). As per University Honors policy, the thesis must be completed “with distinction.” The final thesis is due in the same semester in which Psy 4999 is completed. Exceptions must be approved by petition.
- Present the results of their research in an appropriate public forum (i.e., Psychology Undergraduate Research Symposium, CSBS Research Day, University Undergraduate Research Symposium, Departmental Honors Poster Session) approved by the Psychology Honors Advisory Committee.

1The minimum requirement is 2 semesters of research totaling 6 credit hours, but students will be encouraged to pursue their research in greater depth. Students may petition to count Psychology 4910 Teaching Experience or a specific service or special projects course (e.g., Psychology 4951, Special Projects, or Psychology 4421, Service Project in Social Psychology I) in place of 3 of the required research units.
2Transfer students (those entering with more than 59 credits) may satisfy the research experience requirement with only 3 units of Psychology 4800-4806, although such students will be encouraged to seek additional research experience. Transfer students electing this option may not substitute teaching or service courses in place of Psychology 4800-4806.
3Praxis labs can count as one of these electives (3 credits of electives) only. Transfer students are only required to complete 6 credits of electives.

Students who complete the Psychology Honors research and thesis requirements listed above and 9 credits of the Psychology Honors electives listed in Table 1 (see next page) are eligible to graduate with an Honors in Psychology degree.
Table 1. Honors Electives in Psychology

Official honors sections of any of the 1000- through 4000-level classes listed below may be used toward the 9 required credits of Honors electives in Psychology. Classes at the 5000-level will automatically count as honors electives even though there will not be an official honors section listed with these classes. Students may choose their 9 elective credits from a single area of psychology or across areas.

3000 Statistical Methods in Psychology
3330 Stress Management
3460 Health Psychology (new honors course)
3470 Emotion and the Brain: Clinical Neuropsychology of Emotions (new honors course)

4080 History and Theories of Psychology
4120 Memory: Individuals and Societies (new honors course)
4125 Topics in Cognitive Psychology (Cognitive Science Seminar; new honors course)
4130 Cognition in the Wild
4450 Intergroup Relations
4460 Social Psychology of Health and Illness
Honor 4474 Psychology Through Science Fiction (existing honors course)
4706 Social Psychology Research Methods: Doing It for Real
4961 The Makings of a Moral Person: Lessons from Developmental Psychology

5120 Advanced Human Cognition
5150 Advanced Cognitive Electrophysiology
5220 Cognitive Development
5260 Social Development across the Lifespan
5400 Advanced Environment and Behavior: The Psychology of Social Action
5410 Advanced Social Psychology
5450 Personality Theory and Research (course being revised for Fall 2013)
5500 Quantitative Methods I
5510 Quantitative Methods II
5700 Cognitive Neuroscience
5960 Topics in Clinical Psychology (Resilience)
5962 Topics in Health Psychology (Personality and Health)

* Praxis labs can count as one psychology honors elective only. A petition requesting a Praxis lab to count must be submitted to the Honors academic advisor through the CSBS petition link before submitting the application for the thesis project.
Administration of the Departmental Honors Track in Psychology

Honors Advisory Committee. The Departmental Honors Track in Psychology will be administered by a Departmental Honors Faculty Advisor who works with the Director of Undergraduate Studies and the Psychology Honors Academic Advisor. This committee (hereafter referred to as Honors Advisory Committee) will oversee the departmental honors track and perform the following specific tasks: admit students (see Admission below); work with the advising center to track, advise, and support students (see Academic Advising below); assist students in identifying potential faculty advisors for the thesis; track student progress on the thesis; mediate when necessary between students and advisors; and evaluate whether honors theses are completed “with distinction.” Each completed honors thesis will be evaluated jointly by the faculty thesis advisor and the departmental honors faculty advisor, who must both approve the thesis. Once these advisors have approved, the Chair of the Psychology Department is required to approve per Honors College requirements. The Honors Advisory Committee will also identify appropriate presentation opportunities for students to use to meet the research presentation requirement (see Presentation Opportunities).

Curriculum development. The Honors Advisory Committee will evaluate all new proposals for departmental honors courses or honors sections of courses. The advisory committee will also work with departmental faculty to develop proposals for college- and University-based contributions to the Honors College curriculum.

Petition process. The advisory committee will evaluate all student petitions regarding honors electives and other program requirements. These evaluations will be completed on a rolling basis (at least monthly), with all decisions communicated in writing (typically e-mail) to students, their faculty thesis advisors, and the Psychology Advising Center. The link to petitions is here: https://csbs.utah.edu/forms/petition-course-substitution.php

Remediation and reinstatement. The advisory committee will also work with individual students and faculty advisors in cases where a student is making insufficient progress in either the research experience requirements or the thesis research or needs to repeat a course to maintain his or her GPA at the 3.5 level required for successful completion of the program. In all such cases, a written plan of remediation and conditions for reinstatement to full departmental honors status will be formulated, and student progress will be monitored through the Psychology Advising Center as needed.

Exit survey and continuous improvement. Finally, the Honors Advisory Committee will develop an exit survey or interview to assess students’ experiences in the program and to obtain suggestions for improvement.

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4 Typically, the faculty advisor will be a regular member of the psychology faculty, but not emeritus faculty. The advisor is expected to have an active research program within the department. In cases where students have well-defined research interests that are not represented by departmental faculty, a student may petition to have a primary advisor from another department (e.g., Psychiatry, Educational Psychology) provided that the petition outlines plans for coordination with the departmental honors faculty advisor and the resulting thesis conforms to the standards of the Department of Psychology. A meeting between the faculty outside the department and the Honors thesis advisor is necessary before approval can be granted.
Academic Advising

Integration of honors track with academic advising. The Departmental Honors Track in Psychology will be integrated fully with the offerings and procedures of the Psychology Advising Center. Several systems will be implemented to coordinate the efforts of the departmental honors faculty advisor, Director of Undergraduate Studies, and the specific Psychology Honors academic advisor in order to recruit, advise, support, and retain honors students through the completion of their degrees. Along with regular meetings with the Departmental honors faculty advisor, Psychology honors students will be required to see the Psychology Honors academic advisor once per semester to assess their progress and maintenance of academic standards (i.e., required GPA) commensurate with program expectations. The advising center will offer special scheduled Psychology Honors appointments for first-year honors students, incoming honors transfer students, and current honors students at any level of program fulfillment. When an Honors teaching assistant is available, then he or she will augment duties related to meeting with students in the program and will actively pursue in-person meetings with Honors College students majoring in psychology. These appointments will focus both on the selection and scheduling of honors program courses and also the selection of research experiences and other professional development opportunities (teaching, service) that will serve students well in developing their honors thesis research.

Dissemination of program information through departmental and Honors College websites and Psychology Advising Center. The departmental honors faculty advisor, Director of Undergraduate Studies, and Psychology Honors academic advisor will work together to develop web-based information about the departmental honors track, including opportunities to do research with faculty. This information will also be available to students in the advising office. The departmental honors faculty advisor will also coordinate with the Honors College to maintain accurate, current information about the departmental honors track and links to the Psychology Advising Center and departmental honors faculty advisor on the Honors College website.

Dedicated honors appointments. The advising office will be transitioning to an online self-scheduling option for students through www.psych.utah.edu as well as the CSBS website. In the new program, students will have the option to choose from a menu of different types of advising appointments. Advising appointment menu options for Incoming Honors (transfer and first year) and Semester Mandatory Psych Honors will appear in the scheduling interface so that honors students will be able to easily schedule their required advising appointments.

Recruitment of Prospective, Incoming, and Transfer Students

The advising center will work with the Student Recruitment offices to make special appointments for incoming prospective honors students with either the advising office or with the assistant to the Honors program. This service is already provided, but will be redesigned to address the Psychology and University honors tracks as options for students. Advisors will also integrate the new departmental honors option into the current orientation advising for all incoming students of any status. Finally, a presentation about the departmental honors track will be added to Psychology 2010, Orientation to Psychology as a Science and Profession, required of all majors including transfer students.
Admission to the Psychology Honors Program

The application process will consist of two parts -- an initial application to the departmental honors track and a second application in which a faculty advisor has already been secured and a specific thesis topic and research timeline are proposed. The initial application may take place at any time in the student's undergraduate career up until the beginning of the spring semester of the Junior year or credit equivalent for transfer students, with exceptions considered by petition for students who may discover an interest in psychological research relatively late in their undergraduate careers, as long as they have a written plan for how they will meet program requirements. Applications to the departmental honors track will be accepted twice annually in October and March and reviewed by the Honors Advisory Committee.

Initial application. Students are encouraged to make their initial application to the Honors College as early as possible in their academic careers in order to receive honors-related advising concerning coursework and research opportunities. The initial application (listed as Phase 1 on the Honors Psychology website) consists of materials required by the Honors College for their application. See this website for the current application requirements: https://honors.utah.edu/admissions/admission-process/. If students are already enrolled in the Honors College, then the initial application has been completed.

Honors thesis application. A second application that describes the proposed thesis project and its timeline will be required no later than January of the Junior year or credit equivalent for transfer students. An important element of this application is that a faculty thesis advisor will have already been secured, and the thesis advisor will provide a letter of recommendation. This application therefore consists of the following elements:

(1) a 1- to 2-page description of the project (rationale, hypotheses, proposed methods, proposed analyses, importance to theory and application);

(2) a one-half page timeline outlining the steps needed to initiate, conduct, and complete the project;

(3) a letter of support from a faculty member who has agreed to supervise the thesis

It is important to emphasize that initial acceptance into the departmental honors track does not guarantee its successful completion. Students must complete their research experience units with distinction and find a faculty advisor willing to supervise their thesis. The Honors Advisory Committee will assist in identifying potential advisors, but cannot guarantee the availability of particular faculty or the willingness of faculty to supervise theses on diverse topics outside their professional expertise. Information in the Psychology Advising Center and on the departmental honors track webpage will provide suggestions to students about how to identify potential faculty advisors and approach them about supervising their thesis. If an assistant to the Honors advisor is in place, then he or she will also aid students in identifying potential faculty advisors. Exceptions to this rule will be considered on the basis of written petition to the Honors Advisory Committee, provided that the petition includes a plan for successful completion of the thesis and all other requirements of the departmental honors track.
advisors through in-person meetings. Most departmental faculty require at least one semester of research experience in their own labs before considering students for the thesis.

Although the Honors Advisory Committee will officially admit students to the departmental honors track, individual faculty members retain full discretion in agreeing to supervise students for the honors thesis. For example, a faculty member may elect to admit an honors student to his or her lab on a provisional basis prior to agreeing to supervise an honors thesis. The Honors Advisory Committee will provide guidance to faculty and students on ways that faculty should communicate their individual expectations concerning the quality, amount, and timeliness of research productivity they expect from honors students as well as how to provide feedback on whether a particular student is meeting these criteria and thus is likely to have a particular faculty member agree to supervise his or her thesis.

In addition to the discretion of the faculty advisor, the Honors Advisory Committee also has discretion concerning whether to allow students to remain enrolled in the Honors thesis track. For any of the following reasons, the Honors Advisory Committee may review a student’s progress in order to evaluate continuation in the program:

1) If a student changes his or her proposed thesis project, they will need to petition the Honors Advisory Committee and submit a new written proposal, which the committee will review before determining continuation in the program. Note that this petition and new proposal are only required for potential major changes. If questions arise about what constitutes a major change, then consultation with the Honors Advisor must occur.

2) If a faculty advisor is no longer willing to advise a student, the faculty advisor shall advise the committee. Unless a new advisor can be secured within 2 months, the student is terminated from the program. If a new faculty advisor is secured, then a new proposal must be submitted and a consultation with the Honors Advisory Committee must occur before continuation in the program is granted.

3) If a student has petitioned to successfully extend the thesis project after completing Psych 4999, then he or she has one year from the completion of that course to finish the project or else will be terminated from the program.

4) If a student is not making sufficient progress in Psych 4998 per the Honors Advisor or the Honors teaching assistant, then a formal meeting with the student and his or her faculty advisor must occur before enrollment in Psych 4999.

**Student Events, Presentation Opportunities, and Recognition at Graduation**

The psychology honors track will continue the department's long-standing traditions designed to promote, support, and recognize honors students and their work. Additionally, a new series of psychology honors social events will be initiated.

*Psychology Honors Social Events.* The Psychology Department will hold a social event (e.g., a pizza party) for the honors students and relevant faculty/staff as a means of solidifying the cohort and promoting student friendship and collaboration. The event will be either annual, likely held at the beginning of the fall semester, or twice per year, held at the beginning of fall and spring semesters.
Presentation Opportunities. All departmental honors students will be required to present their work in poster form at one of the following venues: the CSBS Research Day, any other special undergraduate research presentation events on campus, or the departmental poster session, typically held in each April but recently merged with the college research day. Students will also be encouraged to present their work at other state-wide and national undergraduate research conferences, as well as University of Utah student research days at the state legislature and other professional and community venues as appropriate.

Psychology Honors Graduation and Thesis Award. The department will award a prize for best Honors thesis in the amount of $500 in the spring of each year. Students completing the thesis in either the fall or spring are eligible for the award. Approximately one month prior to graduation, the Honors Advisor will solicit drafts or final projects to be included for consideration for the department thesis award. The Director of Undergraduate Studies will then work with the Honors Advisor to appoint at least two faculty in the department to review the submitted theses and to provide rankings for the award. Consultation with the Director of Undergraduate Studies will occur if agreement is not reached between the two faculty. The winner of the award will be announced at the Honors College graduation as well as at the department graduation ceremony in the spring.

The Department of Psychology will continue its tradition of inviting honors students and their families and other guests to participate in our special departmental graduation ceremony and reception that recognizes senior thesis students, Masters degree recipients, PhD recipients, and student, faculty, and staff awards. Students will receive recognition of their accomplishments in the printed event program of this annual event and will be individually introduced and celebrated during a formal ceremony attended by their advisor, other faculty members, and fellow honors students.