

Combined BA/MA (Four-Plus-One Program) **Department of Psychology, College of Arts and Science**

The Department of Psychology in the College of Arts and Science offers the opportunity for students at Vanderbilt to earn a Bachelors degree (BA) and a Masters degree (MA) in just five years of study.

Perhaps the most important preparation for graduate school in psychology, neuroscience, and related areas is significant research experience. In addition to having sufficient grades, GRE scores, and letters of recommendation, students admitted to top graduate programs often have a year or more of research experience. Some students have participated in an honors program. Some have worked as an undergraduate research assistant. Some have worked as a full time research assistant for a couple of years before applying to graduate school. This combined BA/MA program provides another possible route for obtaining the research experience and training necessary for admission to top graduate programs. It also offers opportunities for additional research experience for undergraduates already enrolled in the honors program or who are working as research assistants in laboratories. In addition, it offers a way for students earning an undergraduate degree in a discipline other than psychology or neuroscience to be better prepared for doctoral work in these disciplines.

This is a *highly selective program* with an intensive research emphasis. It is primarily intended for students who are considering a PhD or MD-PhD in a research-oriented graduate program in psychology, psychiatry, cognitive science, neuroscience, learning science, and related disciplines. The program could also be appropriate for students interested in research-oriented programs in marketing and managerial decision making offered by some business schools or research-oriented programs in law and human behavior offered by some law schools. This program offers no training in clinical practice whatsoever, although it would be excellent preparation for students interested in doctoral programs in clinical science that follow what is called a scientist-practitioner model.

In this program, students would earn a BA degree at the end of their senior year, graduating along with the rest of their class. The MA would be earned after the fifth year, based on graduate work completed in the senior year and the fifth year.

Admissions Overview

The combined BA/MA program allows Vanderbilt University students to study for both degrees. Although some students will earn both degrees in Psychology, the program is open to students earning their BA degree in any Vanderbilt program. In particular, an MA in Psychology could be appropriate for students earning a BA in Neuroscience, Biological Sciences, or Computer Science who wish to pursue advanced graduate study in psychology, neuroscience, cognitive science, or learning science. We advise students earning their BA degree in a program other than Psychology or Neuroscience to earn an undergraduate minor in Psychology.

This is a research-intensive program. In addition to coursework, students complete two years of research under the mentorship of one faculty member. Admission to the program requires that a faculty member agree to serve as a mentor. The designated faculty mentor must write one of the

two required letters of recommendation. Students interested in the combined BA/MA program should begin discussions with potential faculty members in the first semester of their junior year. Note that faculty members have no obligation to mentor students in an MA research project. It is the responsibility of the student to identify a suitable faculty member who is willing to mentor him or her.

Application Procedure

This program is highly selective. Students should have at least a cumulative 3.0 GPA to be competitive for admission to the program. The program is only open to current Vanderbilt University undergraduates.

The first step is to identify a faculty member who agrees to serve as a mentor. Once a faculty mentor has been identified, application for admission to the combined BA/MA program should be made directly to the Department of Psychology.

Applications must include:

- *A statement of purpose.* This statement should discuss anything that might be relevant to an admissions decision. This is your opportunity to talk to the admissions committee directly. Ideally, your statement should address why you wish to be admitted to the combined BA/MA program, your preparation for the program, a summary of the research project you might work on, and your future plans after receiving a MA degree. This is also your opportunity to discuss anything else you might need the admissions committee to know about you, but please keep your statement relevant to an admissions decision to a research program. This statement should be no more than two single-spaced pages.
- *Two letters of recommendation.* These letters must come from Vanderbilt faculty. One letter must be from the faculty member who has agreed to be your faculty mentor. These letters can be mailed directly to the program or they can be included along with the application in a sealed envelope.
- *A current Vanderbilt transcript.* Only a Vanderbilt transcript is needed. There is no need to include transcripts from high school.

Deadline:

Applications must be made by the beginning of second semester of the junior year.

Applications should be sent to:

Combined BA/MA Program in Psychology
c/o Vay Welch, Education Coordinator
Department of Psychology
301 Wilson Hall
Vanderbilt University
Nashville, TN 37203

Admission Decisions

Admission decisions are made by the Graduate Studies Committee in the Department of Psychology. This is a highly selective program. The committee will carefully review the transcript to determine whether the applicant is likely to succeed in graduate-level coursework.

The committee will pay special attention to the statement of purpose and letters of recommendation in making its admission decision. As a highly selective program, we anticipate that strong students may not be admitted.

Curriculum

Students in this program must satisfy all requirements for both the BA degree and the MA degree. There is no double-counting of credits. The principal distinction between this program and the standard graduate program is two-fold: (1) students are allowed to take graduate-level courses while completing the Bachelor's degree; and (2) students are thereby enabled to complete both degrees within five years. Students will need to use a combination of Advanced Placement (AP) credits and credits from courses taken over the summer, and may need to register for more than 15 credit hours of coursework in some semesters, in order to be able to take graduate courses during their senior year.

In order to complete the program in five years, students should be in a position to complete nearly all of the requirements for their undergraduate degree by the end of the first semester of the senior year. As noted in the suggested curriculum below, students will typically take 2 graduate and 3 undergraduate courses in each semester of their senior year.

The Master's degree (MA) in Psychology requires:

- *36 hours of graduate credit.* 24 hours will be taken in the fifth year, leaving 12 hours to complete in the senior year.
- *Statistics (6 hours).* Two courses make up the first-year statistics sequence. In the fall, either 304A-A&S (Quantitative Methods and Experimental Design) or 310-P (Statistical Inference) is required. In the spring, either 304B-A&S (Quantitative Methods and Experimental Design) or 311-P (Experimental Design) is required. During the past several years, the specific sequence has been 310-P in the fall and 304B-A&S in the spring. Note that PSY209 Quantitative Methods, or an equivalent course, is a prerequisite for the first semester graduate statistics course.
- *Other Coursework (12 hours).* Students must take four courses offered by the graduate program in Psychological Sciences (i.e., any graduate-level course offered by the Department of Psychology or the Department of Psychology and Human Development, or any courses listed in Appendix A of the Graduate Student Handbook for Psychological Science). The particular courses the student takes must to be approved by the student's faculty mentor. In addition to these four graduate courses, students who are not earning an undergraduate degree in Psychology or Neuroscience should take at least one advanced psychology course each semester during their senior year.
- *Research Colloquium (0 hours per semester for four semesters).* Every semester, students are required to regularly attend one of the research colloquia that meet each week (registering for 0 hours per semester). These colloquium series are an important forum for faculty, advanced graduate students, and invited guests to present their recent research. The colloquia are PSY357 Seminar in Cognition and Cognitive Neuroscience, PSY358 Seminar in Neuroscience, and PSY360 Seminar in Clinical Science. The student's faculty mentor will determine which colloquium series is most appropriate for the student to attend.

- *Research (18 hours)*. This is a research-intensive Master’s program. Students will begin a research project in their senior year and register for 3 hours of research per semester at that time. Students will register for 6 hours of research per semester in their fifth year.
- *Summer Residency*. Students are strongly encouraged to stay at Vanderbilt over the summer between the senior year and fifth year to continue their research project. Summer is a time when faculty and graduate students can devote a significant amount of their time to research.
- *Master’s Thesis*. The culmination of the Master’s research project is a written Master’s Thesis. The expectations for the thesis will be established by the student’s faculty mentor with oversight by the Director of Graduate Studies.
- *Master’s Defense*. The thesis will be orally defended in front of a two-person committee consisting of the student’s faculty mentor and one other member of the faculty in the Department of Psychology.

Typical Curriculum

Senior Year Fall	Senior Year Spring
<i>Graduate Statistics (3)</i>	<i>Graduate Statistics (3)</i>
<i>Graduate Research (3)</i>	<i>Graduate Research (3)</i>
<i>Undergraduate Course (3)</i>	<i>Undergraduate Course (3)</i>
<i>Undergraduate Course (3)</i>	<i>Undergraduate Course (3)</i>
<i>*Psychology Course (3)</i>	<i>*Psychology Course (3)</i>

*Students earning an undergraduate degree in Psychology or Neuroscience are encouraged to enroll in an advanced undergraduate or graduate course in Psychology (with permission of the instructor). Students from outside of Psychology or Neuroscience must enroll in at least one advanced-level undergraduate course offered by the Department of Psychology each semester. In both cases, these courses count toward the undergraduate degree.

Summer Residency

Student continues his or her research project.

5 th Year Fall	5 th Year Spring
<i>Graduate Course (3)</i>	<i>Graduate Course (3)</i>
<i>Graduate Course (3)</i>	<i>Graduate Course (3)</i>
<i>Research (6)</i>	<i>Research (6)</i>
<i>Colloquium (0)</i>	<i>Colloquium (0)</i>

Masters Thesis and Oral Defense

Thesis and oral defense must be completed before April 1st in order to graduate in May.

Senior Year Evaluation

Students enrolled in the program will be evaluated by their faculty mentor and the Director of Graduate Studies at the beginning of the second semester of the senior year. This evaluation will be based on progress and engagement in their research project. In addition, students must maintain at least a 3.00 GPA in program courses. Students who are permitted to continue will

then be asked to complete an application to the Graduate School in order to be promoted to graduate student status for the beginning of the fifth year of study. Application forms are available for download or can be completed on-line at www.vanderbilt.edu/gradschool. This application procedure is largely a formality. Students who will not be permitted to continue will graduate at the end of their senior year, just as they would have if they had not applied to the program.

Advising

Prospective students earning an undergraduate degree in Psychology can discuss the program with the major advisor. Students from outside of Psychology with general question about the program should contact the Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of Psychology. Primary advising for students enrolled in this program or applying to the program will be the responsibility of the student's faculty mentor.

Financial Aid

Students who are receiving scholarships or other forms of financial aid as a Vanderbilt undergraduate are advised that such aid applies in most cases only toward the completion of the Bachelor's degree or the first four years of their studies (which may include taking some graduate courses during their senior year). Thus, students wishing to pursue the combined BA/MA (Four-Plus-One) option may want to seek support for their fifth year of study through student loans and other financial aid.

A limited amount of scholarship funds is available from the University in support of a small number of Four-Plus-One students in the fifth year of study. Any student accepted into this program who wishes to be considered should consult the Associate Dean for Post-Baccalaureate Programs for details.

In addition, the Department of Psychology has a limited amount of scholarship funds that it can use to support particularly exceptional students with significant financial need. Any student accepted into this program who wishes to be considered should consult the Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of Psychology for details. Members of underrepresented minorities are particularly encouraged to apply.

Contact Information

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