

Master of Science in Psychology Degree Program

Student Guide

Fall 2024

If you are considering applying to our program, thank you for your interest. To learn about our admissions process and to help you decide if this program is a good fit for you, please read this entire guide carefully. This guide includes information about admissions and outlines expectations and requirements.

If you have been admitted to our program, congratulations and welcome! Please review this guide carefully because it includes most of what you need to know to succeed in this program.

I. Goals of the Program

The [Master of Science in Psychology](#) program provides advanced psychology training to prepare student scholars for nationally prominent doctoral programs in psychology and applied careers in areas such as program management, data analysis, and research science. Students will obtain research experience and advanced coursework in psychology.

This research-focused program requires students to work with a research mentor and to be actively involved in a research laboratory throughout the two-year training. Some students may also choose to gain additional applied experiences through internships.

The MS in Psychology curriculum is designed to offer opportunities for specialization in one of the following core fields: developmental, cognitive, social/personality, or neuroscience. Master's degree students will take mostly doctoral-level coursework.

The degree requires 36 graduate credit hours: six hours of core courses in the student's area of specialization, six hours of core courses from an area other than the student's specialization, six hours of core courses in research methods, 12 hours of advanced electives and six hours of independent research. The [graduate catalog](#) provides an overview of course descriptions.

II. Admissions

- A. **Suggested background:** Because this is a graduate degree in psychology, students are encouraged to have a strong psychology background with the following undergraduate courses.
- Statistics and Research Design for the Behavioral Sciences
 - Developmental Psychology
 - Cognitive Psychology
 - Social Psychology
 - Personality Psychology
 - Abnormal Psychology
- B. **When to Apply:** Applications are only accepted for fall semesters; not for spring or summer semesters. Progression through the MS in Psychology program is sequential; the courses that new students must take first are offered in the fall semesters. **The application deadline is February 15th of every year.**

C. Steps to apply

(1) Prospective students will submit their online application, documents, and application fee through may apply online through the [UT Dallas Graduate Admissions website](#).

- *Official college transcripts*: upload a photocopy or PDF of official transcripts for admission consideration.
 - Online printouts, grade reports, unofficial downloaded transcripts, etc., are not acceptable.
 - If granted admission, official copies will need to be submitted to the Office of Admission and Enrollment before enrolling in classes. It is strongly recommended that official transcripts are submitted electronically using an approved system (e.g., Joint Services Transcript, Parchment, WES International Credential Advantage Package). If institutions do not support sending official documents electronically, documents should be mailed in an institution-sealed envelope to The University of Texas at Dallas, Admission and Enrollment, 800 W. Campbell Road, Richardson, Texas, 75080.
- *Resume*
- *Essay/Statement of Purpose*: should be brief and include reasons for pursuing graduate study, relevant previous scholarly experiences, and research interests and goals (including [specific faculty members](#) whose research interests you).
- *Three letters of recommendation*: provide information about the individuals you would like to invite to fill out a recommendation for you. Once their information is entered on your online application, an e-mail containing the recommendation form will be automatically sent to them. Professors or other professionals who have worked with you academically are the best sources of recommendation letters.
- *Graduate Record Exam (GRE) scores*: You may request your GRE General Test scores be sent to the Office of Admission and Enrollment. To learn more about the GRE visit the ETS website: <http://www.ets.org/gre/>.
- *Application fee*
 - Note: Application fees and late application fees are automatically waived for UT Dallas alumni and/or UT Dallas current students. International credential evaluation fees may still be applied.

(2) International applicants should read through the general university requirements here: <http://www.utdallas.edu/admissions/graduate/international-students/>. International applicants may be required to submit proof of English proficiency in addition to the abovementioned requirements.

III. Getting Started in the Program

- A. **Initial contact**: Applicants should regularly check the email account they referenced on their applications. Once an applicant is admitted to the university, a UTD email account is created for them. From then on, all official communication between UTD representatives and students will be routed through that email address. Our primary method of contact with students will be by email, so it is very important that students check their UTD email account regularly.
- B. **Initial advising sessions**: Typically by early May, after students are admitted to the program, they will receive an email with information about the next steps for enrolling. After receiving that email, they will communicate with the Program Head, Dr. Rob Ackerman, about class registration and research lab placement. A student should have a general idea of what classes

they would like to take, and the course lookup feature is a helpful tool for this:
<http://coursebook.utdallas.edu/>

- C. **Enrolling for courses:** After consulting with Dr. Ackerman regarding class selection, students will be enrolled by the Academic Support Coordinator. Because the department carefully controls access to graduate-level courses, students cannot register themselves online.
- D. **Finding a research mentor:** Dr. Ackerman will assist students in their search for a research mentor. The School of Behavioral and Brain Sciences has a large, vibrant faculty; all students will find excellent options for research mentors. Students should consult the list of faculty on the School of Behavioral and Brain Sciences website (<http://www.utdallas.edu/bbs/faculty/>) to familiarize themselves with research programs of interest. Mentors are typically in the Psychology Department but can also be from Neuroscience or Speech, Language, and Hearing Departments. Dr. Ackerman will help each student find the best match. Students should be aware of the following:
 - (1) any research advising is always at the pleasure of the faculty; no faculty member is ever required to accept a student
 - (2) not all faculty members are able to accept new advisees each year; perhaps because their research groups are already full, they have a heavy administrative job, or do not have an active laboratory
- E. **Parking:** Once students are registered for courses, they can purchase a parking pass. Parking permits may be purchased online. For additional information:
<http://www.utdallas.edu/services/transit/park/>
- F. **Financial Aid:** Questions about financial aid should be directed to the Office of Financial Aid:
<http://www.utdallas.edu/finaid/>
- G. **Academic Calendar:** The current academic calendar can be accessed from the UT Dallas homepage: <http://www.utdallas.edu/academiccalendar/>

IV. Expectations for Full-Time Participation in the Program

Students are expected to make a full-time commitment to the program. A full-time graduate course load is nine credit hours (which means nine hours spent in the classroom weekly), and students should expect to spend about three times that amount of time outside the classroom preparing for class. Although the manner of research involvement will vary between the different labs, students are expected to spend at least 10 hours per week working in a research lab each semester and summer. Students must also attend monthly professional development luncheon meetings hosted by Dr. Ackerman. These meetings will include guidance on program expectations, presentations on various professional development issues by guest speakers, and vitally important information about course registration and program requirements (including the poster project for second-year students). Students are also encouraged to take advantage of the many lectures and seminars offered in the School of Behavioral and Brain Sciences.

The classes, class preparation, and involvement in a research lab do not leave much time for additional work responsibilities. Many required classes are offered during the day. This program is designed for full-time students; thus, students are encouraged to think carefully about their schedules before taking on part-time jobs.

- A. **Expectations for Coursework**
- B. **Academic advising:** Students will be advised by the Program Head each semester. During this advising session, the student and Program Head will consult the student's degree plan to chart the student's progress.

- C. **Required courses/degree plan:** Each student will have a degree plan upon which they can chart their progress and ensure they meet the program requirements. A degree plan can be summarized as follows:
- 6 hours of Research Methods Core (a two-course sequence in statistics and research methods)
 - 6 hours of Major Field Core Classes (two courses selected from the following fields: Developmental, Cognitive, Social/Personality, Neuroscience)
 - 6 hours of Additional Core Courses (two courses from an area that differs from the Major Core)
 - 12 hours of Advanced Electives (selected from Master's degree and Doctoral course offerings; can also include internship credit)
 - 6 hours of Independent Study/Research, which culminates in the completion of a required research project presented in poster format (discussed below)
- D. **Grades required for satisfactory progress:** Graduate students are expected to maintain a grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or higher. If a student's GPA falls below 3.0, the student is automatically placed on Academic Probation by the university, effective the following semester. Dr. Ackerman will work with students in this situation to develop a Growth Plan with steps for a successful semester. Students who fail to make sufficient academic progress during the probation period will be automatically dropped from the university. Students must also earn a B- or higher in all core courses.
- E. **Making the most of each class you take:** Most courses taken by MS in Psychology students are doctoral-level courses taught in a seminar format, with heavy reading loads and high expectations for course participation. Students are expected to read all assigned readings prior to each class meeting, attend all classes, and come prepared with questions and points for discussion. Students should expect to spend 9 hours preparing outside of class for each three-credit hour course.

V. Expectations for Research

Students are expected to spend 10 hours per week working in a research lab throughout this program. For two of the four long semesters, students must enroll in Independent Study for research as one of the three required courses each semester. Regardless of enrollment in independent study, students are expected to maintain 10 hours per week of research involvement throughout the program.

- A. **Making the most of your research placement:** The type of research work done will depend on the lab setting, but students should gain the kind of research training and access to data to prepare them to complete the required poster project in the spring of the second year. Students should be present in the lab, attend all lab meetings, ask questions, contribute however asked, request specific opportunities to enhance their training, and become involved in a project that will result in data to analyze for the poster project required at the end of the second year.
- B. **Changing lab placements:** Students sometimes wish to change research placements because their interests change or for other reasons. If a student wants to consider a different research placement, the first step is consultation with the Program Head to discuss the reasons for the change and get assistance finding a new adviser. By the fall of the second year, students should be settled with the research adviser under whom they will complete the program so that there will be ample time to work together on the required poster project over the course of the second year.
- C. **Required poster project:** In the spring of the second year, MS Psychology students are required to present a research project in the form of a poster at a UT-Dallas poster presentation

in April. The format of posters will be typical of that required for posters presented at professional conferences. The poster will be prepared in close consultation with the faculty adviser over the course of the second year. In the fall of the second year, students will be required to submit research questions for posters to their advisers and the Program Head for approval. In January of the second year, the Program Head will notify students and advisers of a series of firm deadlines to prepare the final posters. Full drafts of the posters will be due to advisers in early March. Advisers will give feedback, and posters will be submitted to the Program Head, who will also offer feedback. Posters can only be presented at the poster presentation if they have been approved by both the research adviser and the Program Head. Presenting the research project in poster form is a requirement for graduation.

VI. Required Monthly Professional Development Luncheon Meetings

Students are required to attend professional development luncheon meetings. There are three meetings each semester, approximately once per month, on Fridays. These meetings provide opportunities for us to convey program expectations and for students to gain professional development. Most meetings feature guest speakers. Students are notified of these meetings in advance with plenty of email reminders. Attendance is mandatory.

VII. Expectations for the Summer Between the 1st and 2nd Years

Students should use the summer between the first and second years to continue their research involvement. If relevant, they should begin to prepare to apply for doctoral programs and/or get applied internship experience. Students are not expected or required to take organized courses in the summer, although a relevant course or two is usually offered for those who wish to enroll.

VIII. Applied Internship Opportunities

MS Psychology students are not required to do applied internships, but they can choose to do so if they desire additional applied experience. These internships can be completed for course credit as an advanced elective. For more information, please contact Kristi Noel or Dr. Ackerman.

IX. Resources for Your Use

- A. **Shared Office Space** – MS in Psychology students are fortunate to have access to a shared group office space in JO 3.112 (the Jonsson building connects to the Green building on the 4th floor). To access the office, please contact the Academic Support Coordinator and ask for the door code. The office has a conference-style table with chairs, a few individual carrel desk spaces, comfortable seating, a computer, and a microwave and refrigerator. Students are encouraged to use the space to study, work between classes, and gather for study groups. Please be considerate of others sharing the space and clean up after yourselves. For everyone's protection, please do not share the door code with anyone who is not a student in our Psychology MS program.
- B. **UTD Library** – The University of Texas at Dallas has an excellent library with vast electronic resources and helpful, knowledgeable staff. Students can use databases such as PsychInfo and others to access research articles electronically from computers on and off campus. Materials not owned by our library system can usually be provided electronically within 24 hours by the Interlibrary Loan Department. For more information about the UTD library, see the library website, <http://www.utdallas.edu/library/>.

- C. **The Writing Center** – Students seeking assistance with writing may contact the Writing Center. Please see https://www.utdallas.edu/ogs/student_life/writing_services/ for additional information.
- D. **Disability Services** – Students with documented disabilities or concerns about disabilities are strongly encouraged to contact the Office of Student Accessibility (<https://accessibility.utdallas.edu/>). This office provides qualified students with equal opportunities to experience the academic and social opportunities at the University of Texas at Dallas. For students with documented learning disabilities, this office can assist with arranging for academic accommodations.
- E. **The Counseling Center** – Students facing personal difficulties are encouraged to use the UTD Counseling Center. Please see <http://www.utdallas.edu/counseling/> for additional information.

X. What To Do If You Are Having Academic Difficulty

- A. **Consult with the professor or your research mentor** – The first step in addressing any academic difficulty is to contact the professor or your research mentor first. If you do not understand an assignment or a misunderstanding arises, politely ask the professor for help, and respectfully keep asking if you do not understand.
- B. **Consult with Dr. Ackerman** – If you are not able to get the help you need from your professor or research mentor, feel free to contact Dr. Ackerman. He is glad to help you with addressing your concerns and will consult with relevant faculty when appropriate to get you the help you need.
- C. **Academic probation** - If a student's GPA falls below 3.0, the student is automatically placed on Academic Probation effective the following semester. If a student fails to make sufficient academic progress during probation, the student will be automatically dropped from the university. Students should be advised that per university regulations, graduate students must earn B- or higher grades in all core courses. Students earning a C in the sequenced core courses (Research Methods) must retake the class and earn a B- or higher before taking the second class in the sequence. To apply for graduation, students must be off academic probation.
- D. **Growth Plans** – Students experiencing serious academic difficulty, whether on academic probation or not, will meet with the Program Head to discuss a stringent Growth Plan. A Growth Plan is a series of specific goals the student will have to achieve to return to good academic standing. The purpose of the Growth Plan is to outline specific steps for improvement and to clarify expectations.

XI. Applying for Graduation

Students should apply for graduation just before the beginning of their last semester. During their final advising sessions before the start of the last spring semester, students should carefully review their degree plans with Dr. Ackerman to ensure that they have met the program requirements. If everything is satisfactory, Dr. Ackerman will sign the degree plans. Then, students should bring their degree plans to the Academic Support Coordinator for transport and certification through the Office of Graduate Education. Students can apply for graduation themselves online or while in the Academic Support Coordinator's office. It is important to note that graduation is conditional at this point—a student must concurrently meet the requirements outlined in the degree plan and successfully complete their poster requirement in order to graduate.

XII. Participating in Commencement

Students who have met all of the program requirements will participate in spring commencement. Times and dates of spring commencement are announced in the late winter. Once students have registered for graduation, they should begin to receive emails from the [Graduation Team](#) about important deadlines, how to purchase tickets for commencement ceremonies, how to purchase a cap, gown, and other graduation-related notices.

XIII. Getting Ready for What Comes Next

Many students in this Master of Science in Psychology Degree Program apply to nationally prominent doctoral programs, either in their second year of the program or a little later in some cases. Other students seek employment as research coordinators or at social service agencies.

- A. **Applying for doctoral programs** – Students interested in going to doctoral programs immediately after completing the MS degree should begin discussing this goal with their research mentors in the first year of the program, investigate doctoral programs during the summer between the first and second year, and start preparing applications in the fall of the second year. The monthly lunch meetings will offer detailed guidance on preparing doctoral applications.
- B. **Working with the Career Center to find employment** – The University of Texas at Dallas Career Center offers various services for students seeking positions in psychology-related fields (see <http://www.utdallas.edu/career/> for additional information). The Career Center offers valuable advice for launching a job search, preparing a resume, and interviewing; these topics will also be covered during one of the professional development luncheon meetings.
- C. **Consulting with the faculty** – Students should consult with faculty, both course instructors and research mentors, about their career interests and seek guidance about doctoral programs and employment opportunities. Faculty members are eager to offer their wisdom and use their connections to help students find the right doctoral program or position.

XIV. Program Contacts

There are two of us that serve as primary contacts for this program:

Kristi Noel, Academic Support Coordinator

- Handles admissions and enrollment, adding/dropping courses, and graduation procedures

Office: JO 4.302

Phone: 972.883.2368

Email: kristi.noel@utdallas.edu

Dr. Rob Ackerman, Program Head

- Advises students, assists students in finding research mentors, oversees admissions to the program, coordinates the curriculum and course offerings, and oversees degree plan completion.

Office: GR 4.805

Phone: 972.883.2346

Email: robert.ackerman@utdallas.edu

Though we work closely together, your questions should generally go to the Academic Support Coordinator first. If you have questions, please be in touch with us by email or phone, and we can arrange appointments if needed.

We hope you find this student guide helpful as you pursue the Master of Science in Psychology Degree Program at the School of Behavioral and Brain Sciences.