

Graduate Studies in Cognitive and Behavioral Psychology

Cognitive and behavioral psychologists conduct basic research in areas such as behavioral neuroscience, perception, learning, memory, psycholinguistics, and cognitive development. Research in these areas is becoming increasingly interdisciplinary as more and more disciplines from neuroscience to philosophy contribute their own unique skills to the task of better understanding mind and behavior.

Degrees Required

To enter this exciting field, one needs at least a master's degree. Individuals with a master's degree can work as research assistants in both academic and government settings. Since the master's degree requires extensive training in statistics and research methodology, people with a master's degree can also seek employment in most any research environment as data analysts and project managers. Although it is increasingly rare for professionals with a master's degree to locate a full-time teaching position at a four-year college/university, it is possible to obtain such a position in a community or junior college. A Ph.D. is generally required for a full-time faculty position at a four-year college or university. In addition, some students enter a master's degree program as a stepping-stone towards entry into a doctoral program. Many students choose to get a Ph.D. in cognitive and behavioral psychology to allow them to focus on a specific area of the field (e.g., behavioral neuroscience, perception, etc.). Master's programs in this area tend to be more generally focused (e.g., on experimental psychology) than doctoral programs. Individuals with a doctorate typically have much more career flexibility than those with a terminal master's degree.

Graduate Program Admission

If you are interested in entering a graduate program in Cognitive and Behavioral Psychology, we strongly recommend you include research experience as a part of your undergraduate education. Most students accomplish obtain research experience by completing a research mentorship/special project with a professor. Such experiences are very important for students contemplating entry into a doctoral program; doctoral programs generally have more stringent admissions requirements than 2-year master's programs.

The Cognitive and Behavioral Sciences sequence at Illinois State University is a two-year master's degree program that emphasizes study in basic research content areas (e.g., behavioral neuropsychology, conditioning, perception, learning, memory, psycholinguistics, and cognitive development) and the development of quantitative and methodological skills. Commensurate with faculty expertise, the sequence focuses on three main content areas: behavioral, neuroscience, and cognitive science. The sequence provides a critical foundation for advanced graduate study and can facilitate entry into research-related careers in non-academic settings. Specific objectives of the sequence include building a solid foundation of basic psychological research, which will help students understand and explain behavior.