

## ***Honors Program in Psychology***

Rev. Aug. 2011

### **General Information**

The Honors Program in Psychology is a two-semester program undertaken during the student's senior year. The primary goal of the Honors Program in Psychology is to provide students with an opportunity to conduct and complete a comprehensive empirical investigation under the direction of a faculty member, who serves as the student's Honors advisor. It is important to note that the Honors Program is not restricted to students who plan to pursue graduate study in Psychology. In fact, a majority of students in the Honors Program do not plan to continue their studies in Psychology.

The Honors Program is intended to serve as a capstone experience to a student's career as a psychology major at Washington University. It is expected that the student will participate in all aspects of the planned investigation, including developing the research question, designing the appropriate methodology, collecting and analyzing data, and completing the written thesis.

### **Requirements**

To be accepted into the Honors Program, the student must have both an overall GPA and a Psychology GPA of 3.5 or higher. The program requires that Experimental Psychology (Psy 301) be completed **prior to** entering the Honors Program. The student also must have obtained an Honors advisor, a faculty member who agrees to serve as the research mentor for the Honors project. (The Honors advisor generally is not the student's major academic advisor.) Registration for Honors requires that the prospective Honors student meet with the Coordinator of the Honors Program (Dr. Mitchell Sommers) to discuss the proposed project.

The principal requirement for successfully completing the Honors Program is writing the Honors Thesis. The thesis must relate to an empirical study that was conducted specifically for completing the Honors project. Literature reviews or other projects that would not be considered empirical research cannot be used for completing the Honors thesis in Psychology. Projects started as part of either independent study or experimental psychology may be used for the Honors thesis but they must present new or extended aspects of the original project. The thesis must provide a comprehensive report of the Honors project including a critical review of the literature, a description of methods and results, and a discussion of the theoretical importance of the findings. In addition, students are required to present the findings from their investigation at the Psychology Honors Poster Session and at the Arts and Sciences Undergraduate Research Symposium (in the Spring). Students must also complete both semesters of the special Honors seminar, Study for Honors (Psy 498 and 499). As part of the seminar requirement, students will be asked to turn in a completed draft of the Introduction and Method sections of their thesis by the end of the first semester of Honors.

**Psychology 498 (WI):** All students in Psychology 498 will present a 30-45 minute talk that reviews the background, rationale, and methods of the project. In addition to providing a terrific opportunity to get feedback on the proposed project, the presentations will serve as the basis for the writing assignments.

As of the Fall 2008 semester, Psychology 498 will fulfill the Arts and Sciences writing intensive requirement. The writing assignments for Psychology 498 will consist of five critiques of student presentations. Each critique will be approximately 3-5 pages long and will include: (1) a brief summary of the presentation; (2) a critical of evaluation of whether the background information presented provided adequate motivation for the proposed study; (3) a consideration of the adequacy of the methodology; and (4) some suggestions for improving the presentation and the study.

The goals of the critiques are twofold. First, writing the critiques is designed to develop skills in critically evaluating research. This ability is essential for everyone in today's society (e.g., should you start drinking red wine given some of the reports about its overall positive health effects?). Second, the ability will serve to improve writing skills (another essential ability), by teaching students to present ideas in a clear and organized fashion and to provide feedback to peers in a respectful and useful manner.

Grades for Psychology 498 will be based on the student's completion of an initial draft of the Introduction and Methods sections of their Honors thesis that is acceptable both to the student's Honors advisor and to Dr. Sommers, and on the quality of the written critiques. More details about the presentations, writing assignments, and grading will be provided on the first day of class.

**Psychology 499:** Students in Psychology 498 will focus on completing their written thesis, preparing a poster for the annual Honors symposium (and for the Arts and Sciences Undergraduate Research Symposium) and presenting their results and discussion.

## **General Timetable for Honors Projects**

### **Junior Year**

By the end of their Junior year, students who want to participate in the Honors Program should have an advisor who has agreed to supervise their Honors project. Students should meet with their Honors advisor to identify potential research questions and to obtain necessary background reading. The goal of these initial meetings is to identify the general research question that will serve as the basis for the student's Honors thesis. Please note that a faculty member will likely supervise only one, or at most two, theses. Therefore, the student needs to contact a potential Honors advisor as early as possible.

**Special note:** If you are planning to study abroad during the second semester of your Junior year, it is critical that you contact potential advisors and develop research ideas before going abroad.

If you wait until you return from study abroad, it is most likely that you will be unable to find an advisor for your Honors thesis and/or complete the thesis on time.

**Reminder:** Students must meet with Dr. Sommers Before the first Honors class to discuss their projects.

### **Summer between Junior and Senior Years**

It certainly is advisable to maintain contact with your Honors advisor during the summer to continue preparations for your investigation. In fact, for a number of research projects it may be necessary to collect pilot data and/or to begin your Honors research during the summer. This also is the time for you to be reading intensively the research literature related to your project. At the very least, in addition to the reading, you need to determine how you will conduct the research (i.e., the procedures).

**Special note:** Before any research can commence, you must have completed the necessary forms and received approval from the relevant Human Subjects Review Committee or Animal Studies Committee. Be sure to check with your advisor about completing these forms. This is particularly important for students planning on working with non-traditional populations (e.g., children or clinical populations) because human subjects approval in these cases can take 3-4 months.

### **September-October**

At the beginning of their Senior year, students should meet regularly with their advisor to finalize details of the investigation. The goal should be to have everything in place (including approval from the Human Subjects Review Committee or Animal Studies Committee) so that data collection, if it has not already started, can begin no later than the beginning of October.

### **November-December**

Students should have most of their data collected by the end of the first semester. In addition, students will need to complete a draft of their Introduction and Method sections.

### **January-February**

Students should aim to have data collection and analysis completed by the middle of February. Students should attempt to have a complete draft of their thesis to their advisor NO LATER THAN THE END OF FEBRUARY.

### **March**

Recommendations for Honors are generally due in the Dean's office by the third week of March. As noted, students should submit a completed draft of their thesis to their advisors by the end of February. Once your advisor provides feedback on

this initial draft, you should revise your thesis at least once (but hopefully more than once) based on the comments you receive. The version that you hand in to your advisor in March will be part of the final Honors recommendations. Therefore, the thesis should be in “as close to final form” as possible by the time the Honors recommendation is due.

## **April**

During April, you should continue to fine-tune your thesis. Your advisor will provide feedback on the drafts that you submit, and you should revise your thesis accordingly. You must turn in a final version of your thesis to your advisor as well as to the Honors Coordinator by the last day of classes for the spring semester.

**Special note:** Students are also required to present their research at the Psychology Honors Poster Session and at the Arts and Sciences Undergraduate Research Symposium. You will receive instruction on how to design and print a poster. The Psychology Honors Poster Session is usually held on the first or second day of the reading period and the Arts and Sciences symposium is generally held the weekend before that. You should begin working on your poster no later than the second week of April, as you will need to revise it several times based on comments from your advisor.

## **Registering for Honors**

Study for Honors is a two-semester program (see *Requirements* on page 1.) In the first semester, you will be enrolled for Psy 498; the second semester you will be enrolled for Psy 499. Before registering for Honors, however, you must submit a *Petition for Permission to Enroll* form to the Coordinator of the Psychology Honors Program, Dr. Mitchell Sommers. (These forms are available from the Department, and are located on the rack in the hallway outside room 221, or from the office of the Undergraduate Coordinator, room 207B.) The form must be signed both by you and by your Honors advisor, and must be filed each semester.

Only after handing in the signed *Petition* form to, and obtaining approval from, Dr. Sommers can you then register for Honors (Psy 498/499).

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

*Why should I consider conducting an Honors project?*

The primary reason for conducting an Honors project is to learn more about an area that is of interest to you. The Honors project will provide an opportunity for you to obtain in-depth knowledge about a particular area. It will also provide you with a strong background in evaluating research -- a skill that is important for

almost any career. Finally, the Honors project will allow you to work one-on-one with a faculty member who is an expert in your area of interest. You should NOT conduct an Honors project simply because you think it will improve your chances of getting into graduate school or will "look good" on your transcript.

*When should I start thinking about conducting an Honors project?*

There are several reasons why students should begin thinking about whether they might want to conduct an Honors project during their Sophomore year. First, if you are planning to go abroad for a semester of your Junior year, you will need to have completed Experimental Psychology (Psy 301). This means that you will need to complete statistics (Psychology 300) in your sophomore year. Because space in Experimental Psychology is limited, it is advisable to take statistics no later than your second semester Sophomore year and Experimental in the Junior year. If you are going abroad for the full year, then Experimental Psychology will need to be completed in your sophomore year.

Second, if you are considering an Honors project, it is highly advisable to gain research experience through independent study in Psychology (Psychology 500). Approximately half of the Honors projects in any given year are follow-up investigations to projects that were started as part of independent study in Psychology. Psychology 500 provides an opportunity for you to identify potential research areas that may be of interest to you as well as to identify potential Honors advisors.

The Psychology Department holds an informational session for those interested in Honors sometime near the middle of the spring semester. It is recommended that you attend this session as early as possible in your career – even if you are only considering the possibility of doing an Honors project.

*How should I find an advisor/research project?*

There are a number of ways to identify potential advisors for your Honors project. As noted, one way is to conduct a follow-up study on a project on which you participated as part of an independent study in Psychology. Another way to identify potential advisors is to look at our brochure, *Listing of Psychological Research Opportunities*, in which faculty and their research interests are noted. (You may pick up a copy of this brochure outside the Psychology office, room 225A or from Sharon Corcoran, room 207B.) Students are often hesitant about contacting faculty to serve as Honors advisors. However, if you contact potential advisors early enough, most will welcome the opportunity to discuss potential projects with you.

*How are final recommendations for Honors determined?*

The level of Honors that you **qualify for** is determined by your overall GPA. However, the level of Honors that you will be **recommended for** is determined by the quality of your Honors project and performance in the Honors seminar. For example, if you have a GPA of 3.9, you would qualify for *summa cum laude*. The level of Honors that you actually receive, however, may be lower (e.g., *magna*

*cum laude* or *cum laude*) depending upon the overall quality of your work. It also is important to realize that the quality of your thesis reflects not only the written document but also how much input you had into the design and implementation of the study. In other words, you will be evaluated on your Honors project as a whole, from its initial conceptualization to the final written thesis.

*What kind of course load should I take in addition to the Honors project?*

Conducting an outstanding Honors project is extremely time demanding. As a consequence, depending on your constraints and interests, it is advisable that you not enroll in more than 12 units of classes in addition to the Honors course. You should also NOT register for any other research class (e.g., Psy 500) while you are enrolled in Honors.

*What do we do in the Honors seminar?*

The Honors seminar is designed to provide exposure to a wide range of research projects and to help in the design and implementation of your project. Psychology 498 and 499 meet once a week for two hours. Each student is required to give a 30-45 minute presentation about his or her research project. Because most projects will be in the initial stages during the first semester (Psy 498) of Honors (i.e., most will not have any data collected), the talks will center on the background and design of the research project. One of the main goals of the presentations is to get feedback from the class regarding your project. Often, other people in the Honors Program provide suggestions that significantly improve the design or other aspects of the project.

*Whom should I contact if I have other questions about the Honors Program?*

Professor Sommers is the coordinator for the Honors Program. If you have questions, you can contact him at 935-6561 or by e-mail ([msommers@artsci.wustl.edu](mailto:msommers@artsci.wustl.edu)).

## **Titles of Recent Honors' Projects**

*Working memory in children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder*  
*Effects of depressive symptoms on declarative memory in preschool children*  
*Social support and the well-being of adolescents with asthma*  
*Assessment of the impact of advertising techniques for fitness centers on older adults*  
*Expectancy and susceptibility to hypnosis*  
*Age-related differences in visuospatial working memory*  
*Effects of the self on judgment of others*  
*The phenomenology of false memories: Evidence for spreading activation*  
*Is there a magnitude effect in tipping?*  
*The effects of hippocampal damage induced by kainic acid on neophobia and conditioned fear*  
*Perceptions of date rape*  
*Is having cancer associated with smoking cessation among family members and friends?*  
*Targeting calcium intake in college-age women*  
*Effects of varied magazine images on women's mood, body satisfaction, and drive for thinness*  
*Simpetic: The Simplified Phonetic Alphabet and the effects of type of instruction on new alphabet learning*  
*The effects of working memory span, age, and cueing on the allocation of visual attention*  
*The pupillary response to mode of information presentation and task difficulty*  
*Temporal discounting in choice between two rewards available at different delays*  
*Biological and economic effects influencing the rate and duration of a pigeon's key peck response*  
*The effects of emotion, situation, and personality on coping strategy utilization*  
*The effects of mutant Alzheimer's genes on fear conditioning in mice*  
*Modality effects on reading comprehension in dyslexic and non-dyslexic college students*  
*Language comprehension and working memory deficits in patients with schizophrenia*  
*Probability and delay discounting and cross-cultural stereotyping behaviors*  
*The effects of hippocampal lesions on the establishment and retrieval of conditioned fear*  
*The development of verbal fluency in children*  
*Personality traits as possible vulnerability markers for the development of psychosis*  
*Predictors of visual enhancement and lipreading ability in young and old adults*  
*Episodic memory for emotionally laden words in patients with schizophrenia*  
*On the independent effects of explicit and implicit prejudice on social judgment*  
*Pupillary responses in running memory and simple perceptual tasks*  
*Femininity, masculinity, and disordered eating*  
*Verbal and nonverbal episodic memory in aphasic patients with left frontal damage*  
*Juror decision-making about punitive damages*

*Burnout as a function of personality, social support, and workload*

*Emotional intelligence and coping: Does emotional intelligence moderate individual responses to the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks?*

*The Role of Spatial Ability and Strategy in Organic Chemistry Problems*

*Episodic Memory and Symptomatology in Schizophrenia: Correlations between Brain Activation and Behavioral Response*

*The Effects of Hand Gestures on the Memory of Older and Younger Adults*

*The What's, Why's, and How's of "Ouches" and "Ow's": Pain and its Correlates in Children Undergoing Minor Laceration Repair*

*United We Stand, or Do We? Toward an Understanding of Pro vs. Anti-American Attitudes Following 9/11*

*The Effects of a Prejudice Reduction Program on Controlling Racial Bias*

*Running to the Beat: Effects of Listening to Music While Exercising on Intrinsic Motivation, Exercise Adherence, and Flow*

*Patients' Insights into their Mental Disorders, Number of Hospitalizations, and Current Day of Hospitalization: A Correlational Study*

*Acute Exercise and Cognition*

*The Effects of Biological Information on the Stigmatization of Eating Disorders*

*The Effects of Interference and Trait Anxiety on Working Memory in Different Memory Phases*

*Impression-Managed Responding: The Use of Response Latency to Identify Dissimulation*

*Effects of Priming Traditional Gender Roles on Implicit Attitudes Towards Homosexuality*

*Strategic Processing in Children with Early-Treated Phenylketonuria*