Psychology is both a behavioral and a social science, based on theory and validated by empirical studies of human and animal behavior. Psychology examines contemporary perspectives on principles of human behavior in areas ranging from cognition, language, development, and physiological psychology to interpersonal relations and psychopathology.

Bowdoin offered its first psychology course as part of the Department of Philosophy in 1904. In the decades since then, the field has grown dramatically and has evolved close ties to both natural sciences and humanities, making it a central part of Bowdoin's overall liberal arts curriculum. The Department of Psychology currently offers courses in areas ranging from animal neurophysiology to human language, from basic perceptual processes to developmental and clinical psychology. Its approach emphasizes scientific methods of inquiry and analysis. The Neuroscience Program, sponsored jointly by the departments of psychology and biology, examines the relationships between biological processes and behaviors, including both human and animal studies.

Courses in the department cover the central areas of modern psychology, supplemented by several interdisciplinary areas. Core courses include a general survey course, research design, and data analysis. Intermediate courses examine human development, social behavior, personality, abnormal psychology, cognition, social and cognitive neuroscience, and other areas. Advanced courses focus on topics such as cognitive development, social development, language, creativity, hormones and behavior, memory, and clinical psychology. Class sizes in the department vary from the introductory course, which enrolls up to fifty students in five sections per year, to advanced courses that generally have fewer than sixteen students.

The Major Program

Two to three dozen students major in psychology each year. Students in the department can choose a major within the program itself or elect an interdisciplinary major in neuroscience. Ten courses are required for the psychology major, including Introduction to Psychology, Research Design in Psychology, Data Analysis, four laboratory and advanced courses, and three other electives at the intermediate level or above. The three electives allow students to pursue topics of interest and sample the breadth of the field after consulting with their advisors. It is recommended that the laboratory courses be completed before the senior year. Psychology majors are encouraged to consider an independent study course on a library-, laboratory-, or field-research project during senior year.

Those who plan to study away from campus for one or both semesters of their junior year should complete at least one laboratory course before leaving for their off-campus experience and plan to enroll in two 3000-level courses after returning to campus. The neuroscience major consists of twelve courses, including nine core courses in psychology, biology, and chemistry, and two elective courses from among several choices in psychology, biology, and computer science. An introductory physics course is also recommended.

The minor in psychology consists of six courses, including Introduction to Psychology, Research Design in Psychology, Data Analysis, and one laboratory course.

Independent Study and Honors

Students pursuing an independent study in the department identify topics of interest to develop with the faculty. Independent study courses at any level count as electives, but do not count toward the required laboratory or advanced courses. Qualified psychology majors undertake yearlong senior honors projects involving original research. At the end of the year, honors projects are submitted as
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Psychology

Honors Projects
Recent honors theses completed by majors in the department include:
- Judgments in the Moral and Personal Domains: The Role of Contextual Information
- Emotion Regulation in the Relationship between Rejection Sensitivity, Social Anxiety, and Aggression
- The Right Answer: Understanding Mathematics in a Fifth Grade Classroom
- The Influence of Language on Negotiation and Persuasion
- Two Potential Cognitive Correlates of Creativity: Latent Inhibition and Conceptual Complexity
- Internalized Homonegativity, Social Possibilities, and Psychological Well-Being in Straight, Gay, and Bisexual College Students

Erika Nyhus, assistant professor of psychology and neuroscience, B.A. (California–Berkeley), M.A., Ph.D. (Colorado–Boulder), specializes in cognitive neuroscience and memory. She teaches data analysis, cognitive neuroscience, lab in cognitive neuroscience, and cognitive neuroscience of memory. Her research interests are in the neural processes involved in higher-level cognition, including executive functioning and episodic memory.

Richard R. Thompson, associate professor of psychology and neuroscience, B.S. (Furman), Ph.D. (Cornell), specializes in behavioral neuroscience, endocrinology, and neuroanatomy. He teaches introductory psychology, physiological psychology, comparative neuroanatomy, hormones and behavior, and behavioral neuroscience. His research interests are in the neuroendocrine mechanisms that regulate social behavior in vertebrate animals.

After Bowdoin
Each year, several graduates from the department go on to advanced study in psychology. Recent graduates have pursued doctoral degrees at Boston University, Columbia, Cornell, Johns Hopkins, Michigan State, Penn State, Purdue, Stanford, and the universities of Alabama, Chicago, Denver, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Oregon, and Pittsburgh.

Many of Bowdoin’s psychology majors undertake graduate training in related fields, such as medicine, law, business, public administration, or social work. Often, students will work for a year or two before entering graduate programs. Such interim activities take them into the Peace Corps, Teach for America, residential treatment centers for emotionally disturbed children, schools, university or medical research programs, and private business, providing valuable experiences for future careers.

For more information, go to: bowdoin.edu/psychology/