



PSYCHOLOGY MAJOR GUIDE

WESTERN NEW MEXICO UNIVERSITY

School of Behavioral Sciences

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Important Contacts

- Advising Center <http://advising.wnmu.edu>
- Psychology Advising/Mentoring Corner ([visit](#))

Welcome to the Psychology Program!

If you're interested in understanding what people do and why they do it or if you enjoy working with people, you've chosen the right major. Psychology focuses on scientific studies of human behavior and mental processes. It helps develop strategies that facilitate problem-solving and promote health and well-being (American Psychological Association, 2025). Psychology is one of the most popular majors in the U.S. In 2021–2022, it was among the top fields awarding more than 120K bachelor's degrees nationwide (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024).

The psychology program at WNMU offers these degree options: Bachelor of Arts (BA), Bachelors of Science (BS), and a graduate certificate or concentration for the Master's in Interdisciplinary Studies. Our program covers a wide range of topics in psychology, including courses in the major subfields and many specialized areas. We emphasize the scientific nature of psychology while helping students working toward advanced degrees, professional training, and employment.

The bachelor's degree offers two tracks to accommodate students' needs. Students who would like to be trained as generalists may choose to complete the major with an outside minor. Popular options include Criminal Justice, Criminal Psychology, Chemical Dependency Counseling, Behavioral Health, Coaching, Art, and Sociology. Students who have a passion for exploring various subjects within the psychology curriculum may pursue the major with a concentration in psychology. The available concentrations are: Learning and Memory, Health and Wellness, Mental Health and Clinical Emphasis, and Individuals in Context.

The objective of the psychology interdisciplinary concentration at the graduate level is to allow students to study psychology in greater depth and enhance their understanding of key issues in the field by completing 9 to 18 credit hours of graduate coursework.

This Psychology Major Guide includes tips for success in psychology major, student portfolio requirements, an overview of the bachelor's degree options, recommended course sequences, and tips for career and graduate school preparation.

References

American Psychological Association. (2025). Careers in psychology. <https://www.apa.org/education-career/guide/careers>

National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). Undergraduate degree fields. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cta/>

TIPS FOR SUCCESS IN PSYCHOLOGY MAJOR

1

Start with a psychology degree plan

Develop a degree plan with a program advisor and connect with a faculty mentor.

2

Expand your options in psychology

Take **Education & Careers in Psych** and start building a student portfolio.

3

Develop math & statistic skills

Take **Statistical Principles in Psych** ASAP to prepare for the research methods class.

4

Learn to research & solve problems

Take **Psychology Research Methods & Lab** to develop your professional skills.

5

Enrich your knowledge in the field

Take psychology electives while fulfilling prereqs and major requirements.

6

Wrap up with Senior Seminar

Take **Senior Seminar** to wrap up your portfolio and psychology major.

Psychology Student Portfolio

The psychology student portfolio starts in PSYC 1120 Education & Careers in Psychology and wraps up in PSY 496 Senior Seminar in Psychology. For this reason, you should take PSYC 1120 in your first semester as psychology students and take PSY 496 upon completion of the psychology major.

The main purpose of **PSYC 1120 Education and Careers in Psychology** is to introduce you to the major requirements and kickstart your journey on building a portfolio. By compiling a portfolio with important documents like writing samples, service experiences, research efforts, and work achievements, you are better prepared to apply for graduate programs or get into job market upon graduation.

- I. **Foreword** (A paragraph of summary including your name, degree, what brought you to WNMU, how you have grown and changed as a result of their WNMU experience, and your plans after graduation.)
- II. **Goal Statements and Career Planning**
 - First-Year Goal Statement
 - Senior-Year Goal Statement
 - WNMU Academic Record
 - Career Research Project
 - Resume
- III. **Writing Abilities** (Writing samples or papers from higher-level psychology classes.)
- IV. **Research and Critical Thinking Skills**
 - Manuscript and/or poster from PSY333/334 Psych Research Methods & Lab
 - Any projects or assignments that demonstrate your critical thinking/problem solving skills, e.g., a survey you developed, an experimental design, an analytical paper
- V. **Service Learning/Applied Experience**
 - A summary of your contributions to the university and/or community, e.g., organizations, clubs, committees, department services.
 - Service Learning Paper (does not have to be a psychology course)
 - (Optional) Internship experience in an institute (e.g., counseling center, homeless shelter), as an undergraduate research assistant (URA), or as an undergraduate teaching assistant (UTA)
- VI. **Miscellaneous**
 - Any other important accomplishments
- VII. **Awards & Honors**

In **PSY 496 Senior Seminar in Psychology**, you will be asked to submit your completed student portfolio and provide access to your instructor for grading. The portfolio must include examples of your best work in the form of research papers, poster presentations, literature reviews, etc. In addition, your writing samples must be from the following courses. Please include your writing samples in appropriate areas following the outline provided to you in **PSYC 1120 Education and Careers in Psychology**.

1. Experimental Psychology: _____
2. Cognitive/learning domain: _____
3. Developmental domain: _____
4. Biological domain: _____
5. Socio-cultural domain: _____
6. Psychology Elective 300 levels or above: _____
7. Psychology Elective 300 levels or above: _____

Psychology Major w/ Minor Requirements

35 psychology credit hours minimum with at least 22 in upper division overall

I. Core Requirements (14 credit hours)

1. PSYC 1110 Introduction to Psych (3)
2. PSYC 1120 Education & Careers in Psych (1) – *The student portfolio is introduced.*
3. PSYC 2510 Statistical Principles for Psych (3)
Pre-req: Math 1215, 1220, or 1350
4. PSY 333/334 Psych Research Methods & Lab (4)
Pre-req: PSYC 2510
5. PSY 496 Senior Seminar in Psych (3) – Note. The student portfolio is completed.
Pre-req: PSY 333/334 and at least 21 credit hours in psychology

II. Psychology Content Domains (12 credit hours)

One course must be selected from each of the four areas:

Cognition and Learning

PSY 405 Psych of Learning (3)
PSY 409 Cognition (3)

Biological

PSYC 2250 Brain and Behavior (3)
PSY 412 Psychopathology (3)

Developmental

PSYC 2120 Developmental Psych (3)

Socio-Cultural

PSY 406 Social Psych (3)
PSY 441 Cultural Psych (3)

III. Psychology Electives (9 credit hours minimum)

Courses not used to fulfill your content domain requirements or any of the following courses:

PSY 302 Educational Psych

PSY 308 I/O Psych

PSY 309 Criminal Psych

PSY 411 Health Psych

PSY 416 Topics in Dev. Psych

PSY 418 The Family: A Psych Pers

PSY 425 Theories of Personality

PSY 427 Lifespan Personality Dev

PSY 430 Psych of Gender

PSY 435 Human Motivation

PSY 440 Interpersonal Psych

PSY 442 Positive Psych

PSY 445 Psych of Sports & Exercise

PSY 447 Psych of Prejudice

PSY 470/570 Human Sexuality

PSY 481 Internship

IV. Minor (18-24 credit hours)

Recommended Course Sequence

Semester 1	Semester 2	Semester 3	Semester 4
Intro to Psych (3)	Statistical Principles* (3)	Research Methods* (4)	Senior Seminar* (3)
Ed & Careers in Psych* (1)	Content Domain Any (3)	Content Domain Any (3)	PSY Elective (3)
Math (3-4) if needed	PSY Elective (3)	PSY Elective (3)	Minor (3)
Content Domain Any (3)	Minor (3)	Minor (3)	Minor (3)
Content Domain Any (3)	Minor (3)	Minor (3)	

Note. Taking the * courses in the recommended semester & sequence will avoid delays on your expected graduation date.

Psychology Major w/ Concentration Requirements

50 psychology credit hours minimum with at least 31 in upper division overall

I. Core Requirements (14 credit hours)

1. PSYC 1110 Introduction to Psych (3)
2. PSYC 1120 Education & Careers in Psych (1) – *The student portfolio is introduced.*
3. PSYC 2510 Statistical Principles for Psych (3)
Pre-req: Math 1215, 1220, or 1350
4. PSY 333/334 Psych Research Methods & Lab (4)
Pre-req: PSYC 2510
5. PSY 496 Senior Seminar in Psych (3) – Note. The student portfolio is completed.
Pre-req: PSY 333/334 and at least 21 credit hours in psychology

II. Psychology Content Domains (12 credit hours)

One course must be selected from each of the four areas:

Cognition and Learning

PSY 405 Psych of Learning (3)

PSY 409 Cognition (3)

Biological

PSYC 2250 Brain and Behavior (3)

PSY 412 Psychopathology (3)

Developmental

PSYC 2120 Developmental Psych (3)

Socio-Cultural

PSY 406 Social Psych (3)

PSY 441 Cultural Psych (3)

III. Psychology Electives (9 credit hours minimum)

Courses not used to fulfill your content domain requirements.

IV. Psychology Concentration (15 credit hours)

No more than six credit hours can overlap between the major and concentration.

Learning and Memory

PSYC 2250 Brain & Behavior

PSY 302 Educational Psych

PSY 405 Psych of Learning

PSY 409 Cognition

PSY 435 Human Motivation

Health and Wellness

PSY 411 Health Psych

PSY 435 Human Motivation

PSY 442 Positive Psych

PSY 445 Psych of Sports & Ex

PSY 470 Human Sexuality

Mental Health & Clinical Em

PSY 309 Criminal Psych

PSY 405 Theories of Pers or

425 Lifespan Pers Dev

PSY 412 Psychopathology

PSY 440 Interpersonal Psych

PSY 442 Positive Psych

Individuals in Context

PSY 406 Social Psych

PSY 418 The Family or

440 Interpersonal Psych

PSY 430 Psych of Gender

PSY 441 Cultural Psych

PSY 470 Human Sexuality

Recommended Course Sequence

Semester 1	Semester 2	Semester 3	Semester 4
Intro to Psych (3)	Statistical Principles* (3)	Research Methods* (4)	Senior Seminar* (3)
Ed & Careers in Psych* (1)	Content Domain Any (3)	Content Domain Any (3)	PSY Elective (3)
Math (3-4) if needed	PSY Elective (3)	PSY Elective (3)	Concentration (3)
Content Domain Any (3)	Concentration (3)	Concentration (3)	
Content Domain Any (3)	Concentration (3)	Concentration (3)	

Note. Taking the * courses in the recommended semester & sequence will avoid delays on your expected graduation date.

Psychology Degree FAQs

Question: I prefer face-to-face classes, what are my options?

We offer all of our core classes face-to-face at least once a year. Additionally, at least one popular course in each psychology content domain is available in person annually. By working closely with your academic advisor, you should be able to enroll in many of these in-person classes.

However, since we are a small school with half of our student population attending virtually, we need to optimize our teaching resources by offering many elective upper-division courses online. As a result, you may need to take up to three elective courses virtually.

If you prefer in-person experiences, for one of your electives, you can also choose to complete an internship, directed study, or directed research with faculty. To arrange these opportunities, please reach out to your faculty mentor.

Question: Should I pursue a Bachelor of Science or Bachelor of Arts degree?

Psychology is a science. The BS degree in psychology emphasizes math and science skills in the curriculum. All students receive training in general theories, statistical principles, and research methods so they can be prepared for careers in psychology and related fields.

The BA degree in psychology allows students to take foreign language credit hours to enrich their curriculum. As mentioned earlier, essentially, psychology is a science. All students receive training in general theories, statistical principles, and research methods regardless so they can be prepared for careers in psychology and related fields.

Question: Should I pursue a major with a minor, or a major with a concentration in psychology?

Pursuing a major with a minor outside of psychology provides broader, generalist training. Some students find this helpful because they are also interested in another field and want to gain knowledge in both areas to keep their career options open.

A major with a concentration in psychology focuses on developing your skills and knowledge within the field. This option may be particularly beneficial for students whose educational or career goals align with the concentration area.

Question: Which minor goes well with a psychology major?

Depending on your educational and career goals, you may choose any minor that can complement or enrich your degree plan. Common choices include Criminal Justice, Chemical Dependency Counseling, Coaching, Art, Sociology, and Political Science. The Psychology Program also offers Criminal Psychology minor for students who are interested in gaining a basic understanding of the criminal justice system, criminal psychology vs. victimology, and forensic law. Psychology majors can minor in criminal psychology. However, no more than six credit hours can be overlapped between the major and minor.

Essential Skills and Habits for Psychology Students

Understand that Psychology Is More Than Common Sense

Some students are drawn to psychology because they feel they understand people well or enjoy watching Dr. Phil. When they learn concepts that don't align with their own experiences, they may think that "Wait. That's not how I am," or "But my friends agree with me."

It is important to know that psychology is a scientific study of human behavior from a broad perspective. The principles and findings draw from years of research and systemic investigation, not just personal opinions. Also, "common senses" are not always right.

As a psychology student, your goal is to build a strong foundation in the field. Staying open-minded, curious, and willing to learn will help you succeed.

Use AI Tools Responsibly

AI tools like ChatGPT, Grammarly, and others can help you brainstorm project ideas and/or improve the quality of your writing. Some instructors use detection tools like ZeroGPT, Scribbr, or GPTZero to screen for AI-generated content. If you rely too heavily on AI to generate assignment content or if you use AI tools extensively and over-polish your writing, your work may be flagged.

Always do your own work first. You may use AI tools to brainstorm and enrich your content but always verify the information by tracing it back to original, reliable sources. Then, use your own words to cite those sources to enhance your content. Save your drafts and any sources you reference, including links and files, in case you're asked to provide them. Use AI tools to slightly improve grammar and clarity. Do not allow AI to replace your own critical thinking. Use it responsibly.

Build Professional Relationships with Faculty and Staff

Building professional relationships with the faculty and advisors can make a meaningful impact down the road. This doesn't mean you need to be a social butterfly or spend a lot of time networking with everyone, just be *professional, thoughtful, and responsive*:

- Read and respond to emails and feedback from faculty and advisors—be timely and thoughtful in your replies.
- Schedule and attend advising meetings with your advisor early. Take an active role in developing and monitoring the progress your degree plan.
- Both faculty and advisors work with many students every semester. When emailing, introduce yourself and include details like your full name and student ID.
- Being proactive and respectful in your communication with faculty, staff, and your peers. This can open doors to future opportunities such as research, internships, collaboration, or references.

Psychology Career Preparation

Whether you plan to enter the workforce directly or pursue advanced degrees to expand your career options, purposefully gaining relevant knowledge, experience, and training aligned with your future goals can get you on track long-term success.

Explore Career Paths in Psychology

Psychology is one of the most versatile majors, leading you to roles in counseling, research, marketing, human services, and more. Take time to explore different subfields through electives, service-learning projects, job shadowing, or interviews with professionals.

Develop the Skills Employers Want

Employers value both soft and technical skills. Psychology majors should strengthen their communication, critical thinking, data analysis, and teamwork abilities. Diligently improve the quality your school work and pursue relevant extracurricular activities will help you stand out.

Build Relationships and Seek Mentorship

Connect with your professors and advisors early. They can offer guidance, help you identify opportunities that align with your goals, and write letters of recommendation for you. Joining the psychology club or honor societies can also expand your network. Contact [Dr. Chu](#) for more info on the psychology club and/or Psi Chi Honor Society.

Gain Practical Experience

Hands-on experience is crucial. Look for internships, research assistant positions, or volunteer opportunities fields relevant to your career goals. These experiences help you apply classroom knowledge in real-world contexts and strengthen your resume. Reach out to your faculty mentor if you need guidance.

Use Career Resources

Take advantage of resources provided by faculty, campus career services, and internships. Career guides developed by professional organizations like the American Psychological Association, along with job boards and webinars, can provide up-to-date information and inspiration.

Suggested Readings

American Psychological Association. (2025). Your career: Psychology can take you great places.

<https://www.apa.org/education-career/guide/facts>

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2024, August, 29). Field of degree: Psychology. *Occupational Outlook Handbook*. <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/field-of-degree/psychology/psychology-field-of-degree.htm>

Tips for Graduate School Preparation

- 1. Understand the Graduate School Timeline:** Start preparing to apply for graduate programs in your junior year. Here's a rough guide:
 - **Junior Year:** Starting in the spring, work on researching programs, reach out to potential faculty mentors, and begin gaining relevant research or applied experience. Toward the end of the junior year, draft your personal statement, update your CV, and study for the GRE (if required).
 - **Senior Year:** Request letters of recommendation from faculty who can speak to your strengths. Reach out to a potential faculty mentor at the graduate program you're interested in and start building connections. Complete your applications and submit all required materials well before the deadlines.
 - **Near graduation:** Attend interviews (if applicable) and make decisions by April.
- 2. Check Admission Requirements:** Every psychology graduate program has different expectations. Some prioritize research experience, some require specific coursework, others emphasize clinical exposure, and some require the GRE (though many have gone test-optional). Be sure to:
 - Review program websites carefully
 - Note deadlines and required documents
 - Contact admissions staff with questions
- 3. Strengthen Your Academic and Research Profile:** Most graduate programs value research experience. If possible:
 - Ask a faculty in your undergraduate program to mentor your research efforts
 - Present at undergraduate conferences or assist in writing papers
 - Aim for a GPA of 3.5 or higher, especially in psychology courses
- 4. Write a Strong Personal Statement:** Your personal statement is your opportunity to showcase your strengths and explain how your interests align with the program. Here are some tips:
 - Be clear about your goals, interests, and reasons for pursuing graduate study.
 - Mention specific faculty and their research areas, or program features that attract you.
 - Highlight experiences and skills that you can bring to contribute to the graduate program, if possible.
 - Keep your statement relevant and focused—avoid generic or vague language.
- 5. Prepare for the GRE (If Required):** Some programs still require the GRE, particularly Ph.D. programs.
 - Create a 2–3 month study plan focused on your weaker areas
 - Consider test prep books, online courses, or group study
 - Check whether your programs require the general GRE or Psychology Subject Test (rare, but still required by some).

6. **Get Great Letters of Recommendation:** Ask faculty and supervisors who know you well and can speak to your academic potential, research experience, or work ethic. Give them:
 - Plenty of notice (3–4 weeks minimum)
 - A list of classes you have taken from the professor or the time frame you have worked for the supervisor
 - Your resume/CV
 - A draft of your personal statement
 - A list of programs and deadlines, including the links to the programs you are applying for.
7. **Be Organized and Start Early:** Use a spreadsheet to track deadlines, requirements, application status, and contacts. Staying organized will reduce stress and help you avoid last-minute problems.

Suggested Readings

American Psychological Association. (2022). Preparing and applying for graduate school in psychology. <https://www.apa.org/education-career/grad/application-video-series>

Psych Degree Starter. (2025, February 7). How to get into psychology grad school: Requirements, tips, and resources. <https://psychdegreestarter.com/resources/psychology-grad-school-requirements/>

Psychology.org. (2024, May 24). Graduate application guide for psychology students. <https://www.psychology.org/resources/graduate-application-guide/>