The Discipline of Psychology

Psychology may be defined as the scientific study of behaviour, thought, and feeling. To understand the workings of behaviour, thought, and feeling, psychology takes a research-based approach to pursuing knowledge about people.

A variety of research methods are used for building and testing theories about behaviour. A general distinction can be made between basic research (which builds psychology's theoretical base of knowledge) and applied research (which tackles practical problems). The goal of basic research is to identify factors that influence or cause a particular type of behaviour, thought, or feeling. Applied psychologists make use of principles discovered through basic research to solve practical problems.

Psychology at SFU

At the undergraduate level, studies in psychology focus on ensuring students have a solid foundation in the basics of the discipline, including research methods and exposure to multiple areas of psychology.

There are four general goals of the undergraduate program in psychology.

1. To acquire knowledge of the central questions or issues in psychology, of the methods that are used to gather data relevant to these central questions, and of the range and quality of answers presently available.
2. To attain proficient language skills through written and oral presentations.
3. To improve student's empirical, analytical, and inferential skills by practice in the critical analysis of issues in psychology, resulting in high levels of problem-recognition and problem-solving skills.
4. To enrich personal, social, and cultural life through exposure to a variety of perspectives on central psychological issues.

The goals of a liberal arts education (a Bachelor of Arts degree) are to enhance students' written and oral language skills, analytic and research skills, and communication skills, rather than to prepare students for a particular career.

Although some students who major in psychology do pursue a professional career in applied or academic psychology, the vast majority do not. There is nothing particularly special about psychology in this regard: the same is true of other liberal arts disciplines such as history or philosophy.

Students who are interested in a career in psychology should consider pursuing graduate studies. If this is your plan, become involved in research during your undergraduate studies and consider completing the Honours Program. Try volunteering as a research assistant with a professor whose work interests you!

Our Undergraduate Plans

We offer a variety of psychology plans: minor; extended minor; major; joint major; and honours. Information on these programs is available in the SFU Calendar (the official source of program information) and on the Psychology Department website.

It is in your best interests to declare a psychology program as early as possible. Upper division courses are 100% reserved for psychology majors and minors. Please avoid declaring a psychology plan in the semester you graduate!

You may declare a psychology program after completing the basic requirements of that program. To declare a psychology program, please email a copy of your gosfu advising transcript, sorted by subject, to the Psychology Undergraduate Advisor.

The deadline for declaration is before the enrollment periods (March, July and November).

Psychology Course Selection

Students often ask "what should I take?" The short answer is "whatever interests you!"

If you plan to declare a psychology program, you do need to complete specific lower division requirements (outlined in the Calendar and on our website). However, you have a great deal of freedom in exploring different areas of psychology. Our programs are designed to allow you individualized selection of courses.

It is recommended that you take PSYC 201, 210 and 300W early in your program.
The undergraduate psychology program at SFU offers a broad range of courses that examine theory and research in five areas:

1. cognitive & neural sciences
2. developmental
3. law & forensic
4. social
5. clinical science
6. history, quantitative & theoretical

You can select courses which focus on one or more of these areas.

**Prerequisites & Waivers**

Students often ask if a prerequisite can be waived so that they can register in a particular class. Waivers are not recommended! Prerequisites ensure that you have the necessary background information so that you have a chance of success in the course.

You should plan your courses so that you possess the appropriate prerequisites for upper division classes. Take a variety of 200-level psychology courses, so that you do not limit your upper division course selection by the absence of prerequisites.

Prerequisite waivers may be granted at the discretion of the instructor if he or she is convinced that you have the necessary background to be successful in the course. Note that waivers are not entered until the end of the registration period. Registration in classes is not guaranteed.

**Degree Completion**

To complete a degree, you must meet certain requirements of the University and the Faculty, as well as the requirements of your psychology program. The faculty/university requirements include completing at least 120 credits, of which at least 45 are upper division. The psychology major requires approximately 55 credits, of which at least 30 are upper division. So, you can see that there is plenty of “room” to complete programs in other departments, to complete breadth requirements, or to change programs part way through your degree.

Please see the SFU Calendar for all degree requirements. Requirement checklists are available on the Psychology Department website.

**Resources**

Psychology Department  
http://www.sfu.ca/psychology/

Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences  
www.sfu.ca/fass

SFU Calendar  
www.sfu.ca/calendar

WQB Requirements  
http://www.sfu.ca/ugcr/for_students.html

Academic Deadlines  
www.students.sfu.ca/deadlines

Student Learning Commons  
http://learningcommons.sfu.ca/

Health & Counselling  
www.sfu.ca/hccc

Career Services  
www.sfu.ca/careerservices

Study Abroad  
www.sfu.ca/studyabroad

Coop  
www.sfu.ca/coop

**Academic Advising**

Please remember that each student is responsible for ensuring that his or her academic choices meet the requirements for graduation. All requirements are outlined in the SFU Calendar. Advisors are available to provide guidance; however, the student has ultimate responsibility.

When emailing me, please include your full name, student number and advising transcript.

When seeing me, if your question is degree related, please bring a current copy of your advising transcript, sorted by subject.

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