Who Should Take the Honours Program?

The Honours Program is for students who have demonstrated outstanding academic performance and who plan to go on to advanced study and research. Students may be planning to apply for graduate school in psychology or in a closely related field. Close contact with faculty members, research training, preparation for graduate study, and the opportunity for participating in original research are features of the program.

Who Should Not Enter the Program?

1. Students who have not demonstrated significantly better than average academic performance.
2. Students who do not enjoy psychological research.
3. Students who do not wish to specialize, either because specialization is not congenial for them or because they wish to enter professions for which a broad education is requisite.

Requirements for the Honours Program

The admission requirements must be complete by the June 1st application deadline. The application form and the list of faculty teaching and research interests are available at the Psychology General Office and at www.sfu.ca/psychology.

Application Requirements

1. Completion of 75 credit hours with a minimum CGPA of 3.33.
2. Completion of 15 SFU Psychology credits with a minimum CGPA of 3.0.
3. Completion of (“with a minimum grade of C)
   - PSYC 100, 102, 201*, and 210
   - One course from Group A: PSYC 221, 280
   - One course from Group B: PSYC 241, 250, 260, 268, 270
   - One additional course from Group A or Group B
4. Completion of PSYC 300 and 301* with a minimum grade of B.
5. Attendance at an Honours Information Session.
6. Completion of the Honours Program Application form, with approval and signature of a Psychology faculty member willing to supervise the Honours Project.
7. Submission (with the Honours Application form) of a proposal. Students must submit a brief outline of their planned project when they apply for the Honors program, and indicating agreement to supervise the student under these conditions. This consists of an outline of approximately two pages describing the area of study with a few key references, the question they plan to address and a brief description of the type of methodology and data analysis that they plan to employ.
8. Depending on your project, the completion of the Tri-Council Ethics Certificate or the Animal Care Services training.

*If student does not have PSYC301 completed before they apply, they must:

- Provide a letter from their supervisor acknowledging that the student will be completing Psyc 301 in the Fall term and that if the student fails to achieve a minimum grade of B that they will be withdrawn from the honours program, and indicating agreement to supervise the student under these conditions
- Have a CUDGPA of at least 3.67
- Enroll and complete PSYC301 in the fall term with a minimum grade of B.

Note that students are not guaranteed admission to the Honours Program. If denied, the student can appeal through the Psychology Undergraduate Steering Committee.
Continuation Requirements

1. Maintain a minimum 3.0 CGPA for all courses taken each semester.
2. Maintain a minimum 3.0 CGPA for all Psychology courses taken each semester.
3. Attend the graduate research seminar in the appropriate graduate area while enrolled in PSYC 490/499.

Students not meeting the requirements may be dropped from the program, but may apply for readmission at a later date.

Completion Requirements

1. Complete 60 upper division credit hours, of which 50 must be in upper division Psychology courses, including:
   - PSYC 308 History and Systems of Modern Psychology (or PSYC 207 with a grade of C or better)
   - PSYC 490, Honours Project (Fall)*
   - PSYC 499, Honours Project (Spring)
   
   * to be taken only after the student has completed at least 90 credit hours of university work, with at least 20 upper division Psychology credits

   NOTE: No more than 9 upper division credits may be in Directed Studies courses. Up to 12 upper division credits may be approved options from other departments.

2. Meet the honours graduation requirements of the University and the Faculty of Arts and obtain certification by the Undergraduate Studies Committee that the program has been satisfactorily completed.

The Honours Project

The Honours Project (PSYC 490 and 499), a two-semester project (fall/spring sequence), is the most important part of the Psychology Honours Program. It provides an opportunity for the student to become involved in original research. Some honours projects originate entirely with students; others are closely related to ongoing faculty research programs. Most projects are developed during discussions between student and advisor.

Topics of recent Honours Projects include: children's coping processes; the effects of mood on social judgments; inhibition-of-return at multiple locations in visual space; the effects of alcohol on the visual evoked potential; the effectiveness of tape-recorded relaxation instructions and biofeedback training on muscle contraction headaches; and the ability to recognize emotion displayed in facial expressions.

Although the results of many honours projects are presented at scientific meetings or published, producing publishable research is not the primary goal of the Honours Project. Rather, the primary goals are to develop the student's research competence through participation in original research and to demonstrate the level of research competence achieved.

The Psychology Department has a vested interest in assuring that its Honours graduates acquire a high level of knowledge and competence in psychology. The Honours Program is designed to accommodate varied research activities conducted in diverse settings. Therefore, the procedures governing the evaluation of Honours Projects are based on a system of individual judgment and common criteria.

Honours students are expected to attend the relevant Area Seminar, normally held monthly.
PSYC 490

Activities in PSYC 490 typically include presentation of research plans, discussion of methodological issues, and information sessions for intending graduate students. One faculty member will serve as an overall instructor in PSYC 490, which will meet as a regularly scheduled class during the fall semester. Together, the student and the primary supervisor will identify secondary supervisor; this second advisor is either a psychology faculty member or a faculty member in a related area approved by the Undergraduate Studies Committee. Students will use PSYC 490 to develop a research proposal based on readings of the literature and on discussion with their advisors. Where feasible, pilot work on the research should also be undertaken in this semester.

The topic of the research should be one that fits within generally recognized areas in psychology. A central question should be formulated in ways that can be answered by marshaling evidence. The evidence typically will be data collected by the student in the course of measuring the phenomenon in a subject population. Because the Honours Project must be completed in two semesters, students should be careful not to choose projects that make them too dependent on the cooperation of external institutions and agencies.

PSYC 499

This course supplies an opportunity for Honours students to gather, analyze, and report data as described in the research proposal. Students may seek out specific advice from any qualified faculty member, but the bulk of supervision remains the responsibility of their major project advisor.

The analysis of the data is expected to be reasonably sophisticated and critical. Students are expected to use appropriate statistics. The populations studied shall be protected through the operations of the ethical approval procedures of the University.

The Honours Project report must be written in clear English. Students should adhere to the most recent edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association for all aspects of the report including the presentation of figures, tables and references.

At a scheduled time before the final day of the examination period in the spring semester, students will present an oral defense of the project. Guidelines for the oral examination are provided below.

Oral Exam

Each student enrolled in PSYC 499 in the spring semester will be examined orally on his or her final honours project report. The purpose of the oral defense is to allow faculty advisors to explore the student's understanding of the nature and implications of the research described in the written Honours Project report. The oral defense will take place according to the following guidelines:

1. The student must submit the final project to the examining committee and undergraduate advisor three days before the scheduled exam. This must be done in order to qualify for the Honours prize.
2. The members of the examining committee will be the student's two faculty advisors; an additional faculty member will chair the examining committee.
3. At least one member of the examining committee must be present in person for the oral exam.
4. Oral defenses should last no longer than one hour. The exam will begin with the Chair asking the student to spend no more than 10-15 minutes summarizing the honours project research, then inviting the senior and second advisors to take turns questioning the student. The chair is not expected to ask questions, but is entitled to.
5. Following the completion of the questioning or one hour, whichever comes first, the Chair will excuse the student and will ask the faculty advisors to discuss the student's written work and oral performance and to determine the appropriate grade.
6. The student's grade in PSYC 499 will be determined primarily by the quality of the research and its description in the honours project report, and secondarily by the student's oral defense of the project.
The Honours Student-Advisor Relationship

Honours students report that one of the best parts of the honours experience is working one-to-one with a faculty mentor. Therefore, choosing an honours advisor can be one of the most important parts of the process. Most students find an advisor by taking a course from a professor whose area of research interests them. Through formal discussions in the context of the course and informal interactions initiated because of the student's intrinsic interest in the material, the faculty member and student get to know one another and discover that they have compatible interests that give rise to a good research project. Other ways that students can get to know faculty are to volunteer or work as a Research Assistant in a lab, or to take on a Directed Studies course.

How does a faculty member choose a student? An honours project is a great deal of work for both the student and the faculty member. Although an advisor will be there to help, an honours student needs to have the ability to work independently, to take responsibility and initiative for many small tasks that have big consequences (like filling out the ethics approval forms and getting questionnaires to duplicating on time), and to persist in the face of unexpected impediments. A faculty member will want to know that, although the student is encouraged to have independent ideas, there is sufficient interpersonal and intellectual compatibility to ensure a productive working relationship. These are hard things to know if the student and professor have had no contact before.

What should a student look for in an advisor? Just as faculty members will want to get to know the students, students will also want the chance to "size up" their potential mentor. There are a number of good questions that can be asked to help decide if a faculty member would be a good mentor:

1. Am I impressed by this person's scholarship? Read some recent publications by the prospective advisor to see whether the philosophical or methodological approach he or she takes suits your way of thinking about things.

2. Where does this advisor fall on a scale of "guided" vs. "independent" research? How involved will he or she be in providing structure, influencing your design and choice of measures, reading multiple drafts of your thesis, watching a practice talk, etc.; and how much involvement of that kind is desired?

3. Do I want to get involved in my mentor's work, or do I prefer to follow my own inspiration? Sometimes faculty have ongoing research, a part of which would make an appropriate honours project. Such a project can rank high on efficiency and do-ability, but lower on creativity. Other honours projects are very much the students' own idea from start to finish and may not be directly linked to what a faculty member is doing. Such a project demands a lot of independent work on the part of the student, but can be extremely satisfying when his or her own ideas are validated. Neither choice is right or wrong, but one may suit a student's needs and interests better than the other.

4. What is this person's availability? Is he or she on campus five days a week, or about to go to Fiji for six months of field research? It is generally normal for students and their advisors to meet weekly during the first semester while students are designing their studies, and less often while data collection is taking place. There are, of course, individual differences. If the student and advisor have decided on the design after working in the lab, the student may not need intensive supervision. In contrast, a student may thrive on frequent meetings and lots of feedback. Either way, discuss with the advisor his or her approach toward supervising an honours thesis so that a mutually-agreeable working relationship can be established before a commitment is made.