About Us

The Experimental Psychology PhD program at the University of Alabama focuses on training students for careers in research and college-level teaching. Experimental psychologists may work in universities, research institutes, government agencies, and private businesses or nonprofit organizations. The Experimental Psychology PhD program at UA typically takes 4-5 years to complete. All students receive an assistantship that pays a stipend for at least four years; tuition during the academic year is waived, and health insurance and benefits are provided.

The program uses a mentor model for research training in which students work with a specific faculty member whose research focus matches the students’ interests. The Experimental program is divided into three concentrations – Cognitive, Developmental, and Social.

Experimental vs Clinical programs

Experimental psychology programs provide training in a wide variety of research areas, as well as training in college-level teaching. The program does not provide training in clinical work (conducting therapy or assessments). However, many experimental psychologists conduct research on psychological disorders, including understanding risk factors and developing interventions. For example, Dr. Caitlin Hudac and Dr. Rajesh Kana conduct research on learning and social cognition associated with neurodevelopmental disorders such as autism spectrum disorder and intellectual disability. Dr. Ian McDonough conducts research on human memory, including Alzheimer’s disease. We encourage you to reach out to faculty members to determine if your research interests are a good match!

QUESTIONS?

Experimental Program Director:
Andrea Glenn | alglen1@ua.edu
Careers in Experimental Psychology

Experimental psychologists work in a wide range of settings. Here are some examples of careers of experimental psychologists:

• University professor, conducting research, teaching, and training students
  • UA Alum Dr. Rachel Thibodeau-Nielsen, University of Missouri
  • UA Alum Dr. Callie Gibson, Drury University
  • UA Alum Dr. Susan Loveall, University of Nebraska-Lincoln
  • UA Alum Dr. Marie Moore Channell, University of Illinois
• Professor at a liberal arts college (primarily teaching)
  • UA Alum Dr. Gregory Tortoriello, Farleigh Dickinson University
  • UA Alum Dr. Allyson Phillips, Ouachita Baptist University
• Working for a business, organization, or government agency to understand or change aspects of human behavior
  • UA Alum Dr. Andrew Tungate, Data Scientist at Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
  • Dr. Jackie Ogden works at Disney to facilitate guests’ appreciation for the environment
  • Dr. Robert McCann works at NASA to improve user experience
  • Dr. Emanuel Robinson is a senior research scientist in the Transportation and Safety Research Group and works on ways to reduce car crashes in teens
  • Dr. Erin Baker-Burgoon is a social psychologist working at Facebook
• Connecting research and policy
  • UA Alum Dr. Jenna Reardanz is an Associate Policy Analyst at Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago

Dr. Jenna Reardanz, a 2021 graduate of the Experimental Psychology PhD program, is an Associate Policy Analyst at Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. She works to improve outcomes for children and families.

Dr. Rachel Thibodeau-Nielsen, a 2017 graduate of the Experimental Psychology PhD program, is an Assistant Professor at the University of Missouri studying school readiness, executive functioning, and cognitive development.
Benefits of Experimental Psychology vs Clinical

1. More time to focus on research and coursework
2. If you’re interested in one particular disorder you can spend more of your time focused on researching that rather than spending time in clinical training to assess and treat a wide range of disorders.
3. The Experimental program can be completed in a shorter timeframe (less coursework and no year-long internship).
4. Experimental may be a better fit for those wanting to work in non-academic positions such as industry, the National Institute of Health, foundations, or policy making.
5. For those interested in teaching, the Experimental program provides more opportunities for developing teaching skills and teaching your own classes.
**UA Experimental Psychology Research**

### COGNITIVE
- Attention
- Creativity
- Cognition and aging
- Cognitive control
- Executive functions
- Episodic memory
- Human factors
- Intelligence
- Spatial cognition
- Wayfinding

### DEVELOPMENTAL
- Adolescent relations
- Aggression
- Civic engagement
- Family dynamics
- Fantasy/imagination
- Gender stereotypes
- Positive well-being
- Reading
- School readiness
- Self esteem
- Social exclusion

### SOCIAL
- Attitudes
- Emotion regulation
- Meta-science
- Motivation
- Politics
- Person perception
- Personality
- Religious beliefs
- Replicability
- Self-control

### Clinical populations we study

- Aggression & behavior disorders
- Anxiety
- Autism and intellectual disabilities
- Genetic syndromes, including Down syndrome

### Experimental Program Highlights

**Statistics Minor**
We offer a statistics minor with courses in multivariate and categorical statistics, multilevel modeling, and stats consulting.

**Teaching of Psychology Course**
Experimental students take a course on teaching and teach a section of Intro concurrently. Students receive guidance and feedback on course development and teaching skills.

**Neuroscience Methodology**
Faculty in Developmental, Cognitive, and Social have expertise in a variety of techniques, including MRI, EEG, and eye tracking, physiological measurements, and hormones.

**Dual Concentrations**
We offer dual concentrations in Developmental Science and Cognitive Psychology, or Developmental Science and Social Psychology. Dual concentrations allow students to take courses and gain expertise across disciplines.
For her dissertation, UA cognitive psychology PhD student Barbara-Shae Jackson examined perceptions and responses of black and white viewers to art created by black and white artists. She developed an exhibition at the Paul R. Jones Museum entitled “When They See Us, What Do They See? Perspectives on Black Art.”

Experimental Psychology Benefits from Diversity

Psychological science must capture the full range of human experiences in order to truly understand psychological constructs or phenomena. Different identities in race and culture shape influence individuals’ psychology. Everyone benefits if the field of psychology is representative of the population as a whole. A more representative workforce of psychologists is more likely to pursue questions and problems that reflect a broader perspective on humanity.

In the Psychology Department at UA, we aim to improve diversity in psychology and in the psychology workforce. In addition to recruiting graduate students and faculty from a variety of backgrounds, the Experimental Psychology program has active research programs addressing a wide variety of topics including racial and gender disparities, stereotyping, how aesthetic perceptions may differ by race, rural health disparities, and many more.

Everyone belongs in science.

Experimental Psychology professors Dr. McDonough, Dr. Harrell, and Dr. Black, along with two clinical psychology professors recently published an article on the importance of considering intersecting identities in understanding ethnoracial health disparities in older adults. UA is located in a region with high levels racial and socioeconomic diversity, including close proximity to the Black Belt.

Sources of Nonreplicability in Aging Ethnoracial Health Disparities Research

Ian M. McDonough, Erin R. Harrell, Sheila R. Black, Rebecca S. Allen, and Patricia A. Parmelee
Department of Psychology, The University of Alabama
Alabama Research Institute on Aging

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Applying to UA Experimental Psychology

Recommended steps for preparing an application

1. Identify possible mentors & contact them
   • **We strongly recommend** that applicants read through the faculty directory to determine which faculty member’s research may best match their own interests.
   • Visit our website for an overview of faculty research areas: [https://psychology.ua.edu/research-overview/](https://psychology.ua.edu/research-overview/)
   • We encourage you to email the faculty member with any questions you may have, though this is not required. **Applicants should list the faculty member’s name who they are interested in working with in their personal statement.**

2. Prepare application materials
   Select Experimental Psychology on your application. We encourage you to also specify your primary area (Cognitive, Developmental, or Social). Your application will include:
   • **A resume or curriculum vitae** (“CV”)
   • **Education transcripts** (e.g., college, graduate programs)
   • **At least 3 letters of recommendation** (e.g., instructors, research faculty)
   • **Personal statement (Statement of Purpose)**: see tips below!
   • **Optional**: Writing samples (e.g., thesis, course paper)
   • **Optional**: Syllabi from statistics or research methods courses

Tips for your personal statement: This should speak to:
   • Your preparation for graduate school
   • Writing and quantitative skills (and, if relevant, how you’ve handled past challenges).
   • Your desired area of research focus and the alignment with your identified mentor/s.
   • Make sure to include the names of 1-3 potential faculty mentors
   • We are also interested in how students’ cultural, ethnic, or personal backgrounds will bring a unique and diverse perspective to the graduate program.

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Applying to UA Experimental Psychology

3. Submit application to the Graduate School
Submit your application by November 15th on the graduate school website: graduate.ua.edu/prospective-students/apply-now/ The deadline for recommendation letters is December 1st. There is an application fee; international students may apply for a fee waiver.

4. Process for admissions decisions
How are admissions decisions made?
Our program uses a mentor model, which means that each graduate student works with a specific faculty member on research. Each faculty member who plans to accept a student reviews the applications and makes decisions about which applicants to interview. These decisions are often made based on how well the applicant’s research interests match those of the faculty member, as well as the applicants’ potential for success in graduate school. After the interview, faculty members consult with other program faculty to make final admissions decisions.

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