

DOCTORAL DIVISION
IN
DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

Virginia Commonwealth University

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Doctoral Division in Developmental Psychology at Virginia Commonwealth University emphasizes research, theories, and applications in developmental science across the human lifespan, with special emphasis on development in its social context. We combine an applied developmental training model with training aimed at research and teaching careers. Research interests of the faculty include stress and coping, health problems and developmental disabilities in childhood, prevention programs for at-risk youth, parenting in high-risk contexts, and application of cognitive theories to educational settings. Besides the core faculty, affiliate faculty contribute to the education and training of Developmental graduate students. Students also may receive additional training through the Partnership for People with Disabilities and through a variety of externally-funded research and intervention programs.

A. Developmental Faculty

Core Faculty

Area of scholarship

Wendy Kliewer

Social development of school-age children; stress and coping by children and parents; health behaviors; effects of violence on children; coping with illness and community violence.

Barbara Myers

Children and families at-risk; children with autism and other developmental disabilities and their families; children, youth, and families affected by incarceration; parenting; early intervention.

Aashir Nasim

Social development of African American adolescents and emerging adults; sociocultural influences on health; risk, promotive, and protective processes for adolescent substance use behaviors.

Terri Sullivan

Impact of peer victimization and witnessed violence on children's healthy social and emotional development; expanding school-based violence prevention programs to address the needs of students with developmental disabilities.

Michelle Ellefson

Cognitive science; Age-related changes in task switching and switch costs, including the application of executive functions to school achievement. Age-related changes in causal learning and inferential judgments, including the application of causal reasoning to science education.

Affiliate Faculty	Area of scholarship
Kevin Allison	Psychosocial development of African-American adolescents living in urban contexts; psychology training programs for work with diverse populations.
Faye Belgrave	Prevention of HIV and substance use in adolescents; preventive interventions; program evaluation
Rose Corona	Emotional and behavioral adjustment of minority adolescents, particularly Latino youth; developing and evaluating interventions that promote adolescent health and resilience.
Albert Farrell	Evaluation of violence and substance abuse prevention programs for adolescents; clinical computer applications, clinical research methods.
Clarissa Holmes	Developmental psychopathology; pediatric psychology with a focus on endocrinology disorders, particularly diabetes.
Virginia Mackintosh	Family functioning in the face of risks, including families of children with disabilities (most often autism spectrum disorders) and families impacted by maternal incarceration. (Now at University of Mary Washington)
Michael Southam-Gerow	Treatment of childhood internalizing disorders, evaluation of treatment outcome in real-world settings, developmental psychopathology research related to emotion understanding and regulation.
Arnold Stolberg	Promoting children's adjustment to divorce through preventive strategies operating in the schools, in the courts, and through legislative and policy actions; clinical interventions to promote co-parenting in divorced parents; assessing parenting and co-parenting behaviors.
Ayn Welleford	Gerontology; family relations in adulthood; community resources for older adults; geriatric education.

B. Course Requirements

Students in Developmental Psychology must take the Department's core curriculum which has been designed to provide a solid foundation in psychology. In addition, students take required courses in Developmental and a number of elective courses in their specialty area.

Curriculum Approved Spring, 2002

Departmental Core Courses

These 5 courses must be taken prior to awarding the M.S. degree.

PSYC 691 General Linear Models I

PSYC 691 General Linear Models II

PSYC 619 Learning and Cognition

PSYC 629 Biological Basis of Behavior or PSYC 617 Sensation and Perception

Ethics—choose one of the following:

- PSYC 675 Ethical Principles of Psychology (2 credits) OR
- GTE 606 Aging and Human Values (3 credits) OR
- MICR 510 Scientific Integrity (1 credit)

Credits: 13-15 depending on Ethics option

Required Developmental Courses

Students will take all of these courses prior to awarding the M.S. degree.

PSYC 603 Developmental Processes

PSYC 636 Research Methods in Developmental Psychology

PSYC 677 Minority Mental Health

PSYC 671 Readings and research (1-3 credits, may be taken more than once)

(or)

PSYC 690 Research practicum (1-3 credits, may be taken more than once)

Credits: 10-12

Students will take 3 or more 'age-stage' classes.

At least 2 courses must be taken prior to awarding the M.S. degree.

PSYC 614 Infant Behavior and Development

PSYC 691 Early and middle childhood

PSYC 628 Adolescent Development

PSYC/GRTY 602 Psychology of Aging

Credits: 6 before M.S.; 9 total

Students will take 2 or more applied courses

One course is required before awarding the M.S. degree.

PSYC 631 Evaluation Research

PSYC 700 Grant-writing

PSYC 795 Teaching of Psychology (required for students who teach)

PSYC/GRTY 642 Practicum in Clinical Geropsychology

PSYC/IDDS 600 Interdisciplinary Studies in Developmental Disabilities: Teamwork

PSYC/IDDS 692 Directed Studies in Developmental Disabilities

IDDS 691 Special Topics
Or other relevant classes as approved by advisor
Credits: 3 for M.S.; 6 total

Students will take one or more courses in psychopathology or disabilities.

PSYC/GRTY 615 Aging and Mental Disorders
PSYC 616 Adult Psychopathology
PSYC 650 Advanced Child Psychopathology
PSYC/IDDS 600 Interdisciplinary studies in Developmental Disabilities: Teamwork
PSYC/IDDS 692 Directed studies in Developmental Disabilities
IDDS 691 Special Topics
Or other relevant classes as approved by advisor
Credits: 3 or more

Thesis

A thesis is required.
PSYC 798 Thesis (6 hours declared for M.S. degree; may take more hours)

Social psychology—1 course

PSYC 630 Social Psychology OR another approved course in Social Psychology
Credits: 3

Additional training in methodology or statistics: One or more courses

NURS 772 Advanced qualitative research
MGMT 643 Applied Multivariate Methods
MGMT/PSYC 702 Causal analysis for organizational studies
SOC 605 Survey research methods
HADM 762 Health services research methods II
BIOS 543/544 Statistical Methods I/II
Or other relevant courses as approved by advisor
Credits: 3 or more

Recommended Elective Courses from the Department and the University

Students, working with the faculty, should choose additional courses as needed for their career goals. There is no requirement as to how many electives must be taken. Other courses not on this list may qualify, provided students work in consultation with faculty advisors.

GRTY 601 Biological and Physiological Aging
GRTY 602 Psychology of Aging
GRTY 605 Social Gerontology
PSYC 613 Cognitive Development
HGEN 620 Introduction to principles of human behavioral genetics
PSYC/GTY 635 Psychology of Health and Health Care in the Elderly
PSYC 638 Evolution of Psychological Systems
PSYC 644 Individual Tests of Intelligence
PSYC 645 Clinical Assessment of Child Disorders

PSYC/GRTY 641 Survey of Psychological Assessment and Treatment of the Older Adult
PSYC 655 Community Interventions: Development, implementation, and evaluation
PSYC 659 Seminar in Consultation Psychology
PSYC 660 Health Psychology
PSYC 691 Parenting
PSYC 691 Other special topics courses, as available
Credits: variable

Dissertation

PSYC 898 Dissertation (*12 hours for degree; may take more*)

Students specializing in lifespan development and gerontology must take the following set of Gerontology courses in addition to other Developmental and Core requirements. These courses may serve as electives. Taking the full set will result in a Certificate in Aging from the Department of Gerontology:

PSYC/GRTY 602 Psychology of Aging
GRTY 601 Biological and Physiological Aging
GRTY 602/PSYC 602 Psychology of Aging
GRTY 605 Social Gerontology
GRTY 692 Independent Study (2 credits)
6 additional hours of Gerontology electives, chosen with the advisor

C. Expectation for Activities Outside of Course Requirements

Throughout the graduate student career, students work closely with a faculty advisor. The student-faculty relationship is a mutually-chosen partnership; the partnership may change over time, as needed. Students should feel free to change advisors if it furthers their educational goals. Faculty are normally either core or affiliate Developmental faculty. If a student's research advisor is not a core Developmental faculty member, the student should maintain an academic advisor who is a core member.

Part of the work conducted by students with their faculty involves designing, conducting, and writing up research. This work, of course, includes the thesis and dissertation. In addition, students usually work alongside the advisor on the faculty member's research program, learning each step of the research process and earning authorship on jointly-conducted presentations and papers.

Work with faculty mentors may also include the development of other skills such as infant, child, or adult assessment; program evaluation; new computer applications; or participation in an intervention or community program (for example, with infants, adolescents, persons with disabilities, or older adults).

Students are encouraged to seek a developmental practicum experience during the course of graduate training, especially if they plan to work as an applied developmentalist. Opportunities are sometimes available through special grant programs at the Partnership for People with Disabilities.

Current students take part in the LEND (Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities program), which provides interdisciplinary training and practicum experience.

Most students have the opportunity to teach laboratories or college classes and are guided and mentored in their first teaching responsibilities.

In semesters when a colloquium series is being held, students are expected to attend as many colloquia as possible and to be available to offer a colloquium.

Students are expected to submit their own research for publication and for presentation at conferences and, when possible, to attend relevant conferences and workshops.

All students are expected to become good researchers while in graduate school, but some students will want to add additional skills. Students should think through the kinds of careers they hope to have and to gain the skills and experiences that will help them get started in their field. Some students will want a traditional academic career, teaching and doing research in a college or university setting. Some may want to only teach, as in a 4-year college, or only do research, as in a laboratory or institute setting. Others may aim to gain applied skills and to work in an agency, a health care setting, or a community program. Some may want to add administrative experiences in preparation for working in a state or federal agency or serving as a consultant. These goals will be very individual and the plans for meeting them will differ from one student to another.

Students are formally evaluated by the core and affiliate Developmental faculty once each year. The advisor writes a letter to the student reviewing areas of strength and of problems. Students who are not making satisfactory progress may be put on probation or be asked to leave the program.

A very limited number of students are admitted into a dual degree curriculum and will complete the requirements for both Developmental and Child Clinical doctoral degrees. This is in its beginning stages and the formal arrangements are still being developed. Interested applicants should contact the Division faculty for more information.

II. REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MASTER OF SCIENCE DEGREE

A. Master's Degree Credits

Students must complete a minimum of 40 semester hours beyond the baccalaureate degree including the five departmental core courses (13-15 credit hours), 1-3 credits of PSY 671 (Readings and Research) or PSY 690 (Research Practicum), the three required Developmental courses (603, 636, and 677), two age-stage classes, one applied class, and thesis credits (6 credit hours). Students may bring in transfer credits for consideration, following the Department's guidelines. Students must propose, conduct, and defend a thesis. Students should refer to the relevant portions of this Handbook and the Graduate Bulletin for guidance on forming a thesis committee, preparing the proposal, and so on. Students should pay careful attention to completing these requirements within the time limits allowed by the Department.

III. REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY DEGREE

A. Requesting Continuation

After completion of all M.S. requirements, students must submit a doctoral plan of study and formally request continuation in the doctoral program. Entry into the doctoral program is not automatic. For students who enter the graduate program with a master's degree, this request is made after the student finishes the core department curriculum, the three required Developmental courses, and at least three additional Developmental courses. The Developmental faculty consider the request at a meeting. After formal approval for continuation, students must pass a written preliminary examination. Each student must take a minimum of 12 dissertation credits, a Social Psychology course (PSY 630 or another course), and any remaining Developmental or elective courses needed for the student's specialty. The student must also form a dissertation committee, propose, conduct, and defend a dissertation.

B. Preliminary Examination

Prelims are taken after a student after a student has been formally approved for continuation in the doctoral program. Normally, prelims are taken before proposing the dissertation; they must be taken before the dissertation is defended.

The Preliminary Examination allows students to demonstrate their depth of knowledge and their ability to integrate information in Developmental psychology and in their specialty areas. A written preliminary examination must be passed for a student to become a doctoral candidate. The Developmental Division uses an open-book, take-home preliminary exam. Our purpose is to reduce the sometimes frantic and anxiety-provoking nature of the traditional closed-book, timed exam and also to encourage more thoughtful answers. An open-book procedure more closely resembles a real-life professional writing experience. This procedure is periodically evaluated to see that it is meeting our goals.

Students announce their intention to take prelims a semester before they will be taken, to allow time for preparation of a reading list and for study. The faculty advisor, along with the Division Director, provide assistance as the student studies. Lists of previous prelim questions are available to the students.

Students play a key role in preparing their own reading lists for the exam, especially in the specialty areas. Faculty will meet with students and provide guidance as well. Besides reading extensively, students are advised to write essays on their own to give practice in writing well-organized answers.

If the student fails the prelim, one opportunity will be given for retaking the exam. If the examination is failed a second time, the student will be terminated from the program.

These are the conditions of prelims in the Developmental Division, as adopted in April, 1993:

- The preliminary examination is given as a take-home exam.
- New questions are written for each student. Students taking the prelim at the same time may or may not have the same general questions.
- The exam is open-book and open-library. Students may ask clarifying questions of the faculty when they receive the questions to be sure they understand the question but should not have other conversations about the exam with faculty or students as they take the exam.
- Questions are required in the following areas: General Developmental, Research Methods, Social/Emotional Development, and Specialty Area(s). Answers will often “cut across” these traditional areas, however. Specialty Area questions comprise about half the exam.
- Questions require integration across areas of knowledge and require application of knowledge. Adequate knowledge and understanding of pertinent theories and empirical findings are a baseline expectation; creative and thoughtful answers are encouraged.
- Students have four days to write their answers. For example, they might receive the questions at 9:00 a.m. on Monday; answers would be due at 9:00 a.m. the following Friday.
- Page limits are specified for each answer.
- Answers must be typed. Pseudonyms are used when more than one student is answering the same question.
- Students and faculty work together to define individual specialty areas and to develop reading lists. They should begin this early enough to allow for thoughtful reading.
- The prelim exam will be given the week before the start of each semester, unless special circumstances suggest a change in that schedule.
- Each question will be graded by at least two faculty. Faculty outside Developmental may be brought in for grading.

C. Grading of Preliminary Examination

Each question is read and graded by two or more faculty. Each answer is scored as high pass, pass, low pass, or fail. Results of the grading will be discussed at a Developmental Division faculty meeting. The entire exam will be assigned a grade of Pass with Distinction, Pass, Conditional Pass, or Fail. Students who fail three content areas will fail the exam and must retake the entire exam. Students who fail one or two areas will receive a "conditional pass" and must remediate the failed content area(s). The nature of the remediation will be determined by the Developmental faculty. Students who receive high pass on all content areas, or pass on one content area and high pass on the remaining areas, will receive a "Pass with Distinction". Students will receive written notification of their prelim performance.