

## **Combined BA/MA (Four-Plus-One Program)** **Department of Psychology, College of Arts and Science**

The Department of Psychology in the College of Arts and Science offers the opportunity for students at Vanderbilt to earn a Bachelor's degree (BA) and a Master's degree (MA) in just five years of study.

Perhaps the most important preparation for graduate school in psychology, neuroscience, and related areas is significant research experience. In addition to having sufficient grades, GRE scores, and letters of recommendation, students admitted to top graduate programs often have a year or more of research experience. Some students have participated in an honors program. Some have worked as an undergraduate research assistant. Some have worked as a full-time research assistant for a couple of years before applying to graduate school. This combined BA/MA program provides another possible route for obtaining the research experience and training necessary for admission to top graduate programs. It also offers opportunities for additional research experience for undergraduates already enrolled in the honors program or who are working as research assistants in laboratories. In addition, it offers a way for students earning an undergraduate degree in a discipline other than psychology or neuroscience to be better prepared for doctoral work in these disciplines.

This is a *highly selective program* with an intensive research emphasis. It is primarily intended for students who are considering a PhD or MD-PhD in a research-oriented graduate program in psychology, psychiatry, cognitive science, neuroscience, learning science, and related disciplines. The program could also be appropriate for students interested in research-oriented programs in marketing and managerial decision making offered by some business schools or research-oriented programs in law and human behavior offered by some law schools. This program offers no training in clinical practice whatsoever, although it would be excellent preparation for students interested in doctoral programs in clinical science that follow what is called a scientist-practitioner model.

In this program, students would earn a BA degree at the end of their senior year, graduating along with the rest of their class. The MA would be earned after the fifth year, based on graduate work completed in the senior year and the fifth year.

### **Admissions Overview**

The combined BA/MA program allows Vanderbilt University students to study for both degrees. Although some students will earn both degrees in Psychology, the program is open to students earning their BA degree in any Vanderbilt program. In particular, an MA in Psychology could be appropriate for students earning a BA in Neuroscience, Biological Sciences, or Computer Science who wish to pursue advanced graduate study in psychology, neuroscience, cognitive science, or learning science. We advise students earning their BA degree in a program other than Psychology or Neuroscience to earn an undergraduate minor in Psychology.

This is a research-intensive program. In addition to coursework, students complete two years of research under the mentorship of one faculty member. Admission to the program requires that a faculty member agree to serve as a mentor. The designated faculty mentor must write one of the

two required letters of recommendation. Students interested in the combined BA/MA program should begin discussions with potential faculty members in the first semester of their junior year. Note that faculty members have no obligation to mentor students in an MA research project. It is the responsibility of the student to identify a suitable faculty member who is willing to mentor him or her.

### **Application Procedure**

Students should have at least a cumulative 3.3 GPA to be competitive for admission to the program. The program is only open to current Vanderbilt University undergraduates.

The first step is to identify a faculty member who agrees to serve as a mentor. Once a faculty mentor has been identified, application for admission to the combined BA/MA program should be made directly to the Department of Psychology.

Applications must include:

- *A statement of purpose.* This statement should discuss anything that might be relevant to an admissions decision. This is your opportunity to talk to the admissions committee directly. Ideally, your statement should address why you wish to be admitted to the combined BA/MA program, your preparation for the program, a summary of the research project you might work on, and your future plans after receiving a MA degree. This is also your opportunity to discuss anything else you might need the admissions committee to know about you, but please keep your statement relevant to an admissions decision to a research program. This statement should be no more than two single-spaced pages.
- *Two letters of recommendation.* These letters must come from Vanderbilt faculty. One letter must be from the faculty member who has agreed to be your faculty mentor. These letters can be mailed directly to the program or they can be included along with the application in a sealed envelope.
- *A current Vanderbilt transcript.* Only a Vanderbilt transcript is needed. There is no need to include transcripts from high school.

In addition to the procedures specified in the above brochure, applicants to the 4+1 Program must also complete the petition available at:

(<http://as.vanderbilt.edu/docs/4%20plus%201%20Petition%20Form.pdf>). This petition will be signed off by the DGS if the student is admitted into the 4+1 program.

Please see <http://as.vanderbilt.edu/psychology/combined-ba-ma/> for online information about the 4+1 program in Psychology.

See also <https://as.vanderbilt.edu/academics/specialdegree/4plus1.php> for more general information about the 4+1 programs at Vanderbilt University.

Deadline:

Applications should be made by the beginning of the second semester of the junior year.

Applications should be sent to:

Combined BA/MA Program in  
Psychology c/o Angel Gaither  
Program Coordinator  
Department of Psychology 305  
Wilson Hall Vanderbilt University  
Nashville, TN 37203

### **Admission Decisions**

Admission decisions are made by the Graduate Studies Committee in the Department of Psychology. The committee will carefully review the transcript to determine whether the applicant is likely to succeed in graduate-level coursework. The committee will pay special attention to the statement of purpose and letters of recommendation in making its admission decision. As a highly selective program, we anticipate that strong students may not be admitted.

### **Curriculum**

Students in this program must satisfy all requirements for both the BA degree and the MA degree. There is no double-counting of credits. The principal distinction between this program and the standard graduate program is two-fold: (1) students are allowed to take graduate-level courses while completing the Bachelor's degree; and (2) students are thereby enabled to complete both degrees within five years. Students will need to use a combination of Advanced Placement (AP) credits and credits from courses taken over the summer, and may need to register for more than 15 credit hours of coursework in some semesters, in order to be able to take graduate courses during their senior year.

In order to complete the program in five years, students should be in a position to complete nearly all of the requirements for their undergraduate degree by the end of the first semester of the senior year. As noted in the suggested curriculum below, students will typically take 2 graduate and 3 undergraduate courses in each semester of their senior year.

The Master's degree (MA) in Psychology requires:

- *30 hours of graduate credit.* We recommend that students take 18 hours in the fifth year, meaning that 12 hours must be completed in the senior year. Note that graduate (MA) students are only allowed to take up to 12 hours per semester, so a maximum of 24 hours can be taken in the fifth year, leaving 6 hours to take in the senior year. Because 4+1 students are not admitted to the Graduate School until the end of their senior year, they should fill out the 'Request to Enroll in Graduate Courses' form in order to register for graduate level courses during their senior year.
- *Statistics (6 hours).* Two courses make up the first-year statistics sequence. In the fall, either 6104-A&S (Quantitative Methods and Experimental Design) or 8661-P (Statistical Inference) is required. In the spring, either 6104-A&S (Quantitative Methods and Experimental Design) or 8664-P (Experimental Design) is required. During the past several years, the specific sequence has been 8661-P in the fall and 6104-A&S in the spring. Note that PSY 2100 Quantitative Methods, or an equivalent course, is a prerequisite for the first semester graduate statistics course.

- *Other Coursework (18 hours)*. In addition to the two-semester (6 hours) statistics sequence, students must take six additional courses (18 hours) offered by the graduate program in Psychological Sciences (i.e., any graduate-level course offered by the Department of Psychology or the Department of Psychology and Human Development, or any courses listed in Appendix A of the Graduate Student Handbook for Psychological Science). The particular courses the student takes must be approved by the student's faculty mentor. These 18 hours must be regular didactic courses (not research hours).
- *Research Colloquium (0 hours per semester for four semesters)*. Every semester, students are required to regularly attend one of the research colloquia that meet each week (registering for 0 hours per semester). These colloquium series are an important forum for faculty, advanced graduate students, and invited guests to present their recent research. The colloquia are PSY 8557 Seminar in Cognition and Cognitive Neuroscience, PSY 8758 Seminar in Neuroscience, and PSY 8360 Seminar in Clinical Science. The student's faculty mentor will determine which colloquium series is most appropriate for the student to attend.
- *Research (6 hours)*. This is a research-intensive Master's program. Students will begin a research project in their senior year and register for 3 hours of undergraduate research (PSY 3840 or PSY 4998/4999) per semester at that time. Students will register for 3 hours of graduate research (PSY 7999) per semester in their fifth year.
- *Summer Residency*. Students are very strongly encouraged to stay at Vanderbilt over the summer between the senior year and fifth year to continue their research project. Summer is a time when faculty and graduate students can devote a significant amount of time to their research.
- *Master's Thesis*. The culmination of the Master's research project is a written Master's Thesis. The expectations for the thesis will be established by the student's faculty mentor with oversight by the Director of Graduate Studies. A thesis proposal should be submitted to the faculty mentor and one other member of the faculty in the Department of Psychology for approval.
- *Master's Defense*. The thesis will be orally defended in front of a two-person committee consisting of the student's faculty mentor and one other member of the faculty in the Department of Psychology.

### **Typical Curriculum**

Senior Year Fall	Senior Year Spring
<i>Graduate Statistics (3)</i>	<i>Graduate Statistics (3)</i>
<i>Graduate Course (3)</i>	<i>Graduate Course (3)</i>
<i>Undergraduate Research (3)</i>	<i>Undergraduate Research (3)</i>
<i>Undergraduate Course (3)</i>	<i>Undergraduate Course (3)</i>
<i>Undergraduate Course (3)</i>	<i>Undergraduate Course (3)</i>
<i>Research Colloquium (0)</i>	<i>Research Colloquium (0)</i>

Note: Students from outside of Psychology or Neuroscience must enroll in at least one advanced-level undergraduate course offered by the Department of Psychology each semester during their senior year. In particular, non-Psychology majors must enroll in PSY 2150 (Research Methods) unless they have taken an equivalent course in another major. These courses count toward the undergraduate degree.

**Summer Residency**

*Student continues his or her research project. By the end of the summer, the student should submit the thesis proposal to the mentor and one additional faculty.*

**5<sup>th</sup> Year Fall**

*Graduate Course (3)*

*Graduate Course (3)*

*Graduate Research (3)*

*Research Colloquium (0)*

**5<sup>th</sup> Year Spring**

*Graduate Course (3)*

*Graduate Course (3)*

*Graduate Research (3)*

*Research Colloquium (0)*

**Master's Thesis and Oral Defense**

*A thesis is to be handed in to the mentor and one additional faculty. The student then defends that thesis orally in front of this committee of 2 faculty members for evaluation. Thesis and oral defense must be completed before April 1<sup>st</sup> in order to graduate in May.*

**Senior Year Evaluation and Graduate School Application**

Students enrolled in the program will be evaluated by their faculty mentor and the Director of Graduate Studies in the second semester of the senior year. This evaluation will be based on progress and engagement in their research project. In addition, students must maintain at least a 3.00 GPA in program courses. Students who are permitted to continue will then have to complete an application to the Graduate School by the end of the senior year in order to be promoted to graduate student status for the beginning of the fifth year of study. Applications can be completed on-line at [www.vanderbilt.edu/gradschool](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/gradschool). This application procedure is largely a formality. Note that the student only needs two letters of recommendation (which they should already have) for filling the Grad application online, not three (a dummy name can be entered for the third recommender), and there is no need for GRE scores. The student must inform the DGS when the grad school application is completed.

Students who will not be permitted to continue will graduate at the end of their senior year, just as they would have if they had not applied to the program.

Once admitted to the Graduate School, the student should check the Vanderbilt Graduate Handbook about the requirements and dates for graduation. Notably, a 'Notification of Intent to Graduate form' needs to be filled out (and signed by the DGS) ahead of the graduation date.

**Advising**

Prospective students earning an undergraduate degree in Psychology can discuss the program with the major advisor. Students from outside of Psychology with general question about the program should contact the Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of Psychology. Primary advising for students enrolled in this program or applying to the program will be the responsibility of the student's faculty mentor. A faculty member in the Department of

Psychology must serve as advisor. Under special circumstances, a faculty member of the Psychology Department of the Peabody College may also serve as advisor.

### **Financial Aid**

There are no stipend or tuition waiver that come with acceptance in the 4+1 program. Students who are receiving scholarships or other forms of financial aid as a Vanderbilt undergraduate are advised that such aid applies in most cases only toward the completion of the Bachelor's degree or the first four years of their studies (which may include taking some graduate courses during their senior year). Thus, students wishing to pursue the combined BA/MA (Four-Plus-One) option may want to seek support for their fifth year of study through student loans and other financial aid.

A limited amount of scholarship funds may be available from the University in support of a small number of Four-Plus-One students in the fifth year of study. Any student accepted into this program who wishes to be considered should consult the Dean of Graduate Education and Research for details (Dean David Wright).

In addition, the Department of Psychology occasionally has a limited amount of scholarship funds that it can use to support particularly exceptional students with significant financial need. Any student accepted into this program who wishes to be considered should consult the Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of Psychology for details. Members of underrepresented minorities are particularly encouraged to apply.

### **Contact Information**

Angel Gaither  
Program Coordinator  
Department of Psychology  
305 Wilson Hall  
angel.d.gaither@vanderbilt.edu  
615-322-0080

Geoffrey Woodman, PhD  
Director of Graduate Studies  
Department of Psychology  
502 Wilson Hall  
geoffrey.f.woodman@vanderbilt.edu  
615-322-0049

David Wright, PhD  
Dean of Graduate Education and Research  
404K Buttrick Hall  
david.wright@vanderbilt.edu