

A Special Blend



MAJOR

Psychology

www.stolaf.edu/depts/psych

P psychology is a prototypical liberal arts major. The subject, by nature, calls for study and consideration of perspectives across multiple academic disciplines.

“We really are a bridge between the natural and social sciences,” says Professor of Psychology Chuck Huff. To conduct well-rounded studies of human behavior, he explains, it is necessary to consider both the physical characteristics of the brain and the surrounding social factors that shape personality and decision-making. “On both sides we are rigorously scientific,” Huff says. “If you want to use psychology to help people, you can’t just be empathetic. You need to understand the science of psychology to do that well.”

This mindset falls in line with American Psychological Association standards, as well as principles expressed by St. Olaf’s mission statement. Psychology majors are taught to be scientific “seekers of truth” as they develop into responsible citizens dedicated to serving others.

Psychologists examine how people adapt to their environments through biological, social, emotional, spiritual, perceptual, behavioral, linguistic and cognitive processes, so relevant coursework isn’t limited to the social and natural sciences. Classes in fine arts and the humanities can also contribute to a psychology education.

“A number of students are interested in areas like art therapy — how expressing yourself artistically can be therapeutic,” says Assistant Professor of Psychology Donna McMillan. “And I often think that great literature writers are astute psychologists too, because they have a lot of insight into people. That’s what makes their writing so compelling.”

Psychology’s multidisciplinary nature is evident in graduates’ post-collegiate lives. Many St. Olaf psychology

majors pursue further study not only in psychology but also in medicine, law, physical therapy, social work, nursing or ministry. Others enter positions in business or government. Some pursue industrial psychology, helping organizations discover how groups work or how pay systems motivate employees.



Psychology majors Bethany Jacobson '06 (right) and Allison Madison '07 are studying environmental psychology.

“Psychology is a broad and adaptive major,” McMillan says. “It has something to say about a lot of things. If you are going to be a manager at a business, it will pay off to know some things about psychology.”

Psychology majors must complete coursework within both the natural and social sciences. Choices in the natural sciences include “Biopsychology,” “Sensation and Perception” and “Cognition, Learning and Memory,” and in the social sciences, “Social Psychology,” “Abnormal Psychology” and “Psychology of the Personality.”

Real Research

Research is a hallmark of the St. Olaf psychology program. From the earliest years of their undergraduate education, students work alongside faculty members, doing experimental work — from coding caregiver-child interactions and observing how people interact with their environment to measuring neurons in the brains of rats as they search for items in a maze.

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“Our professors are eager to have students help with their research,” says Ashley Miller, a psychology and nursing major who has participated in Chuck Huff’s studies on moral reasoning.

Student research experiences aren’t confined to the lab. Psychology majors often co-author papers that are published in peer-reviewed journals and present findings to audiences at local, regional, national and international professional conferences.

Such immersion is particularly valuable for students who pursue further education. “They often feel like they are a step ahead,” says Huff. “When I write letters of recommendation, I say these students are already socialized to graduate school. At St. Olaf they learn what it is like to do cutting-edge, professional research instead of just reading about it.” ■

Some organizations and events that have invited St. Olaf students to present their research:

- American Psychological Association
- American Psychological Society
- Association for the Study of Play
- Midwestern Psychological Association
- Minnesota Psychological Association
- Minnesota Undergraduate Psychology Conference
- National Leadership Conference
- Society for Computers in Psychology
- Society for Neuroscience
- Society for Personality and Social Psychology
- Society for Research in Child Development

HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ Every year, St. Olaf bestows the Gordon Allport Psychology Award (named for a highly regarded Harvard psychologist) to one or more junior psychology majors. Recipients excel in their studies and exemplify Allport’s devotion to personal growth and integrity.
- ▶ An endowment fund of more than \$71,000 supports the research of St. Olaf junior and senior psychology majors. Approximately \$4,200 of this is distributed each year. The money is available thanks to generous donations by psychology department alumni and their families and faculty members.
- ▶ During Interim, students can explore environmental psychology at Colorado’s Rocky Mountain National Park.



“We have students involved in research on meditation and health, dreaming, the environment, moral reasoning, caretaker’s skills in raising children, neurochemical mediators of alcohol reward systems, the neuronal role in wayfinding and the cognitive representation of numbers.”

— Chuck Huff
Professor of Psychology

Cool Classes

The Psychology of Good and Evil

Students gain insight into why people are compelled to judge behavior as morally good or bad and examine how individuals can commit acts of extraordinary heroism or evil.

Environmental Psychology at Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado

How are we affected by nature? How do we respond to environmental challenges? Students examine ways in which the natural environment is important psychologically to human beings.

A National Leader

Dr. Elizabeth G. Nabel '74

As a Phi Beta Kappa student at St. Olaf in the early 1970s, Elizabeth Guenther, as she then was known, studied French and psychology. Today, as director of the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI) of the National Institutes of Health, Dr. Elizabeth G. Nabel is a leading scientist and recognized expert in the development of genetic and cellular therapies for cardiovascular disease. Her research on vascular biology and the regulation of smooth muscle cell growth has provided important insights into the development of heart disease. A board-certified cardiologist whose interests include women with heart disease, Dr. Nabel was educated at Cornell University Medical College, Brigham and Women’s Hospital and Harvard University. She oversees a \$3 billion budget and 850 federal employees at the NHLBI, where she previously was scientific director of clinical research.

