

## **HONOURS IN PSYCHOLOGY**

### **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

N.B. These questions are relevant to students who wish to enrol in an Honours year of study after they have finished their undergraduate training in psychology. If you are already a student in the Bachelor of Psychology (Honours) program at the Springfield campus, please consult staff there for further information about your fourth year of study.

#### **What is Honours in psychology?**

Honours in psychology is a program consisting of eight units of study that students complete after they have finished their undergraduate degree in psychology. It is accredited by the Australian Psychology Accreditation Council (APAC). Students must complete the Honours year or equivalent if they want to apply for provisional registration with the Psychologists Board of Queensland. Other state registration boards also require Honours or equivalent, but may also have other requirements. Therefore, please check with the registration board in your state.

#### **How long does it take to complete Honours?**

Students would usually complete the program in one year full-time or two years part-time. This period can sometimes be extended in extenuating circumstances that can be documented. However, any extensions of time would need to be approved in advance by the Honours coordinator and the Associate Dean Academic in the Faculty of Sciences.

#### **Can I study externally?**

Yes and no. Honours is run in workshop mode, rather than weekly classes. All students, regardless of whether they are enrolled as on-campus or external students, must attend four one-week workshops during the year. Each workshop usually runs for six to seven days, though part-time students only need to attend the workshop days for the courses in which they are enrolled. That is, part-time students would still attend workshops four times a year, but may only be involved in classes for three or four days at each workshop. Full-time students would be required every day.

#### **When are the workshops held?**

The workshop timetable is usually available from January each year. Successful applicants are sent the first semester timetable with their letter of offer. It is likely that the 2009 workshops will commence on the following dates: 19 February, 14 April, 13 July, and 14 September. However, these dates are yet to be confirmed. Each workshop usually involves six to seven days of classes. Some classes may occur on weekends and/or go into the start of the following week. If you live at a distance, you will need to organise your own accommodation for the workshop blocks. If your application is successful, you will receive information about possible accommodation in your offer letter.

**What if I am unable to attend some workshop days?**

Workshops are compulsory. If you are not able to attend the workshops, you cannot enrol in the Honours program. If you are unavailable some days during workshops, you would usually not be able to continue in the courses you missed. Attendance at workshops is one of the requirements for our program accreditation.

**Can I choose between the Toowoomba and Springfield campuses?**

The Bachelor of Psychology (Honours) program offered at the Springfield campus is accredited as a four-year sequence, whereas the Bachelor of Science (Honours) is a separate program for those who have already completed an undergraduate accredited sequence in psychology either at the USQ or elsewhere. Therefore, students would usually need to complete their Honours year at their home campus. That is, students would usually only do their Honours year at the Springfield campus if they had already completed their undergraduate degree at that campus. If students had completed their undergraduate degree at the Toowoomba campus or at another university, they would usually have to do their Honours year at the Toowoomba campus. Although fourth year courses are similar at the two campuses, there are some differences in content and the way in which the courses are delivered. The Springfield campus runs weekly classes, so it would only be suitable for students who could attend each week. The Toowoomba campus runs Honours in workshop mode, so students would need to attend the four workshop blocks each year. If students felt they had exceptional circumstances for wishing to complete some of their Honours courses at a different campus to their home campus, they would need to discuss this with the Honours coordinator prior to enrolling in their courses. Please note that permission would only be given in exceptional circumstances and it may not be possible for certain courses or in certain semesters.

**Are overseas students able to do the Honours program?**

Yes, but overseas students can only do the Honours program if they can enrol as full-time on-campus students at the Toowoomba campus for the duration of the Honours year. We are not accredited to run the program offshore. If overseas students do come to the Toowoomba campus for their Honours year, they still just do the four workshop weeks with the other students; they do not have extra classes in between. However, they will be able to work on their thesis and other assignment work in between workshops. It is due to immigration and visa requirements that overseas students must study full-time on campus for the Honours year.

**What are the entry requirements for Honours?**

The entry requirements are as follows:

- You must have an APAC-accredited undergraduate degree majoring in psychology. Overseas students who have not completed their undergraduate studies through USQ will need to have their degree assessed by the

Australian Psychological Society (APS) before applying for the Honours program. The APS charges a fee for this assessment.

- Your undergraduate studies in psychology must have been completed no more than three years prior to applying for Honours. So if you are interested in applying for the 2009 intake, you would have needed to complete your undergraduate psychology studies no later than Semester 2, 2005.
- You must have a weighted Grade Point Average (GPA) of at least 5, according to our Honours formula. However, please note that the actual GPA for entry is usually higher than that, as there are limited places available each year.

### What formula do you use to calculate GPA for entry into Honours?

When deciding which students to accept into our Honours program, we do not use the GPA that appears on your academic transcript. Instead, we use our own weighted formula as shown below:

$$[\text{GPA}(1) + 2 \times \text{GPA}(2) + 2.5 \times \text{GPA}(3)] / 5.5$$

GPA (1) means your GPA for your first-level subjects and so on, according to the first number in the course code. For example, PSY1010 is counted as a first-level subject, while PSY3030 is counted as a third-level subject. The only exception is Data Analysis, which is counted as a first-level subject even though it has a second-level code. This is because psychology students typically do that subject in their first year.

When calculating your weighted GPA, we only count psychology subjects and Data Analysis. In working out your GPA for each year level, we don't count fails. If you have repeated a subject, we count the higher grade. In the calculations, HD = 7, A = 6, B = 5, C = 4, and LP = 3.

Example - Imagine you got the following grades:

1st year:	PSY1010 Foundation Psychology A	HD
	PSY1020 Foundation Psychology B	C
	STA2300 Data Analysis	B
2nd year:	PSY2010 Social Processes of Behaviour	A
	PSY2100 Research Methods A	B
	PSY2110 Research Methods B	A
	PSY2030 Developmental Psychology	HD
3rd year:	PSY3010 Assessment of Behaviour	A
	PSY3030 Abnormal Psychology	A
	PSY3110 Clinical Health Psychology	HD

So your formula would be:

$$[5.33 + (2 \times 6.00) + (2.5 \times 6.33)] / 5.5 = 6.03$$

**What is the GPA cutoff each year?**

While the minimum requirement is a weighted GPA of at least 5.0, the actual cutoff is higher than that. It varies each year, depending on the number of applicants, the number of staff available for thesis supervision, and the quota we are given. In most years, the cutoff has been between 5.4 and 5.7, though it has gone a bit lower in some years.

**How many Honours places are offered each year?**

The number fluctuates each year depending on staffing, resources, and other university factors. We usually take at least 40 students, but that number has been higher in some years.

**What can I do if my undergraduate studies were completed more than three years ago?**

If they were completed between three and five years ago, we would usually recommend that you do four undergraduate courses to regain currency. These courses would usually be:

- PSY2100 Research Methods in Psychology A
- PSY2110 Research Methods in Psychology B
- Plus two third-level psychology courses

If your undergraduate studies were completed more than five years ago, we would usually recommend that you complete the Graduate Diploma of Psychological Studies, which involves eight courses and four pre-requisites. It may be possible to get exemptions for the pre-requisites.

Please contact the Honours coordinator for advice before enrolling in further studies.

**What can I do if my Grade Point Average is too low?**

If you are close to the cutoff, it would be worthwhile repeating some subjects and applying again the following year. If you are interested in this option, please contact the Honours Coordinator for specific advice regarding the subjects that you should do. If your GPA is very low, just repeating a few subjects is unlikely to increase your chances of gaining entry into Honours. In those cases, it may be better for you to enrol in the Graduate Diploma of Psychological Studies. This would involve studying eight courses (plus an additional four courses if it is more than five years since you have done the pre-requisites). However, the advantage is that we would only count those subjects when calculating your GPA for entry into Honours. Therefore, if you performed better in the Graduate Diploma of Psychological Studies, you would improve your chances of being accepted into the Honours program. Please note that completion of the Graduate Diploma of Psychological Studies does not guarantee you a place in the Honours program. Entry is still competitive.

## **Can I do the Graduate Diploma of Psychological Studies instead of Honours?**

No. The Graduate Diploma of Psychological Studies is equivalent to the undergraduate accredited sequence in psychology. It provides you with the prerequisite so that you can apply for Honours. It is not equivalent to Honours. Some other universities have a Graduate Diploma that is equivalent to Honours, but they are different programs than the Graduate Diploma of Psychological Studies that we run.

## **Should I apply to other universities as well as USQ?**

It is usually a good idea to apply to other universities, especially if you think your GPA may be too low. The APAC web site lists the accredited psychology programs in Australia. You will then have to contact other universities to find out their requirements. Other universities will probably have a different calculation for GPA and some also have other requirements, such as a third-level statistics course. If you think you might like to apply to other universities, it may be a good idea to study our third-level course PSY3100 Advanced Research Methods and Statistics. This course is usually run in Semester 1, but is not necessarily offered every year. The web address for the APAC web site is:

<http://www.apac.psychology.org.au/>

Click onto "Search for courses in Australasia" and then follow the prompts.

## **My grades were affected by extenuating circumstances. Can I get special consideration?**

Some students may have extenuating circumstances that have contributed to a lower GPA (e.g., poor health or personal issues). Such students can apply for special consideration. There are two types of special consideration.

1. If students had a lower performance at a particular point in their undergraduate program due to major extenuating circumstances that they can document (e.g., serious illness, death in the family), they can include the relevant documentation with their application and ask that the grades for one particular semester be excluded when calculating the GPA. The Honours Coordinator would usually only agree to this if it was clear from the student's academic history that the period of poor performance was most likely due to the extenuating circumstances (e.g., if the student usually attained A's and B's, but received C's in the semester during which the extenuating circumstance occurred). Again, only the grades for one semester could be waived (if at all).
2. If students have a circumstance that has affected their entire degree (e.g., prolonged illness), they can also ask for special consideration. In order to be given special consideration, however, they would still need to be within .2 of the cutoff in that year. For example, if the cutoff for a given year was 5.5, a student with 5.3 could be considered for special consideration if they had

appropriate documentation indicating how their undergraduate performance had been affected by the particular circumstance.

While students are welcome to apply for special consideration, it should be noted that there are no guarantees that their application will be successful. We do not have a set number of places set aside for students with special circumstances. In some years, no special consideration offers are made.

### **Can I choose whether to start in Semester 1 or Semester 2?**

Our main intake is at the start of Semester 1. We usually do not have a mid-year entry, though that can change from year to year.

### **If I am offered a place, can I defer my studies?**

No. Due to the large number of applicants we have each year, we cannot keep a place open for someone who wishes to defer. If you are unable to take up your offer for the start of Semester 1, you would need to decline your offer and apply again for the following year. Please note that there is no guarantee you would necessarily be offered a place again the following year, as it always depends on the cutoff for that year.

### **How do I apply for the Honours program?**

Applications must be received at the USQ by 31 October in order to be considered for the following year. Late applications cannot be accepted.

Australian students should complete a direct entry application form that can be obtained at the following web site:

<http://www.usq.edu.au/resources/directentryapplicweb.pdf>

Overseas students should complete the International Student Application form:

<http://www.usq.edu.au/resources/internationalstudentapplicationform.pdf>

### **Can I apply earlier than October?**

Yes, you can apply earlier. However, we cannot usually process your application until the end of Semester 2 when all of the Semester 2 results are known.

### **How can I apply by 31 October if I don't finish my undergraduate studies until the end of Semester 2?**

Send in your most recent academic transcript with your application prior to the closing date. If you are a USQ student, we will add your Semester 2 results when they become available. If you are not a USQ student, please send in your Semester 2 results as soon as they are available.

## Can I finish my undergraduate studies in summer term and still start Honours in Semester 1?

It depends. If you are just finishing one or two non-psychology electives in Summer Term, then that wouldn't change your GPA. If you had met the GPA cutoff for that year, we would offer you a place with the condition that you pass your summer term courses. If you are completing any psychology subjects over summer, that is a little trickier. If you already have a high GPA, then we may still offer you a conditional place. However, if your GPA is already close to the cutoff, we may not be able to offer you a place. We look at those applications on a case-by-case basis. Overseas students with summer term courses to complete would usually not be offered a conditional place because the results would not be finalised in time for those students to make visa applications.

Students who are completing summer term courses need to be aware of the tight time frame, as we run our first workshop round about the time that the summer term results are released. Some students also find it very demanding to study for summer term courses and then go straight into the Honours program, though others cope well.

## What courses do I study in Honours?

There are eight units of study in the Honours year.

Semester 1	PSY4001	Applied Psychology Project 1 (1.5 units)
	PSY4010	Multivariate Statistics A (.5 units)
	PSY4020	Ethical and Professional Practice (1 unit)
	PSY4030	Skills and Issues in Counselling (1 unit)
Semester 2	PSY4002	Applied Psychology Project 2 (1.5 units)
	PSY4011	Multivariate Statistics B (.5 units)
	PSY4040	Advanced Psychological Theory (1 unit)
	PSY4070	Advanced Assessment (1 unit)

PSY4001 and PSY4002 make up the Honours thesis.

Part-time students would usually do the coursework subjects in their first year (i.e., PSY4020, PSY4030, PSY4040, and PSY4070) and the thesis and statistics subjects in their second year (i.e., PSY4001, PSY4002, PSY4010, and PSY4011).

For more information about these courses, please consult the course specifications:

<http://www.usq.edu.au/course/specification/>

Click on the most recent year, then "P", then scroll down to the courses in which you're interested.

**Can I get any exemptions for courses in the Honours year?**

No. All courses are compulsory.

**Do I have to think of a thesis topic in advance?**

No. Staff members generate the thesis projects and these are advertised on our web site prior to the start of workshops (usually late January or early February). Once the list is posted on the web site, students contact different lecturers to enquire about supervision. If your application for Honours is successful, you will get more information about the thesis when you receive your offer letter.

**What is the main difference between studying as an undergraduate students and studying as an Honours student?**

The main difference is that Honours students are seen as professionals in training. Therefore, we expect that Honours students will be able to take more initiative for their own learning. Staff will certainly provide relevant materials and guidance throughout the program, but students will also need to be more proactive in searching out relevant literature, analysing the material they are learning, and engaging in regular discussion group forums. High levels of critical thinking and in-depth analysis are required and there is more of a focus on the application of knowledge and acquisition of skills. While a good academic performance in the undergraduate program provides a solid foundation or baseline for further study, the Honours program will challenge you in new ways. For example, you will be further developing skills in counselling, professional ethics, assessment, and intervention and will be more fully engaged in research. Some students may also need to brush up on their statistics skills and knowledge of SPSS prior to commencing the Honours year, especially if it has been several years since they last studied statistics. If you have aspirations of going on to further postgraduate study after Honours, you would usually need to get a 2A class of Honours which would mean you would need to get a GPA of 5.8 or greater. Some universities may accept students with lower GPAs than that, but many require at least a 2A. Therefore, you may find you need to perform at a higher level than in your undergraduate studies in order to achieve the desired result. Although this may sound challenging, staff will guide you as you rise to meet these challenges. Hopefully, you will find the Honours program to be very rewarding both professionally and personally.

**How much does it cost to do the Honours program?**

For details regarding fees, please go to the following web site and click onto "course fee finder":

<http://www.usq.edu.au/fees/default.htm>

For further information, current students should contact Student Administration on [fees@usq.edu.au](mailto:fees@usq.edu.au)

Prospective students can lodge a query at the following site:

<http://usqstudy.custhelp.com/cgi-bin/usqstudy.cfg/php/enduser/ask.php>

As well as the fees, students will need to purchase textbooks for each course, and download some course materials. Students will also need to download and/or print articles required for their thesis. Distance students will also have the added costs of travel and accommodation during workshop weeks.

### **Who do I contact if I have further questions?**

You should contact the Honours coordinator:

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University of Southern Queensland  
Toowoomba QLD 4350

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FAX: 07-4631 2721

Email: [nolapass@usq.edu.au](mailto:nolapass@usq.edu.au)

(N.B. This information was correct at 19 September, 2008, but is subject to change without notice).