

Graduate Studies in Developmental Psychology

Developmental psychologists are concerned with behavioral, cognitive, social, and emotional change across human lifespan (infancy through old age). The main goals of developmental psychologists are to chart the nature of change, identify factors that influence such change, and to foster and promote successful development within and across societies. Although many developmental psychologists teach and conduct research, they also perform intervention work, act as consultants to day care centers, schools, medical or social services, or in mental health settings. Thus, this area is scientific, applied, and multidisciplinary in nature.

Degrees Required

A 2-year master's degree is a minimal requirement for working in this field. Individuals with a master's degree typically seek employment in medical/social service/mental health settings that provide services to developmental populations. Although it is increasingly rare for professionals with a master's degree to locate a full-time teaching position within a 4-year college or university, it is possible to obtain such a position in a community college. In addition, some students obtain a master's degree as a stepping-stone towards admission into a doctoral program.

Individuals with a doctoral degree typically have much more career flexibility. Although many developmental psychologists pursue teaching and research careers in academic settings, many also obtain employment in human service, medical, educational and business contexts that work with developmental populations. For the most part, the doctoral degree provides more employment opportunities, more room for professional advancement, and more financial gain.

Graduate Program Admission

Although most people who gain admittance to developmental psychology graduate programs have educational backgrounds in psychology, this is not always the case. It is recommended that applicants have undergraduate coursework relevant to the area, such as life-span developmental psychology, child or adolescent development, or adult development and aging. In addition, employment, internship, or volunteer experiences working with developmental populations can also be helpful.

It is highly recommended that you obtain some research background during your undergraduate experience. Most undergraduate students address this objective by completing a research mentorship or a special research project with a professor. These experiences are very important for students contemplating entry into a doctoral program; these programs generally have more stringent admissions requirements than 2-year master's programs.

The Developmental Psychology sequence at Illinois State University provides preparation in lifespan development using a distinctly ecological and interdisciplinary approach. The curriculum offers in-depth exposure to developmental theories, methodologies, and applications. The sequence offers a two-year master's degree in Psychology.

Students may choose a pre-doctoral focus designed to prepare them for advanced graduate study and academic careers. Students may select an applied focus designed to prepare them for careers in a diverse array of community settings that provide human services requiring training in developmental psychology.