College of Staten Island

BA & BS Psychology
Psychology is the scientific study of behavior and cognitive processes. Psychologists study all aspects of behavior, animal or human: dreaming, intelligence, thinking, mental illness, learning, brain functions, conformity, aggression, sexuality, gender, perception, language, motivation, therapy, culture, social behavior, testing, personality, aging, and memory.

The Department of Psychology at the College of Staten Island (in Building 4S) offers undergraduate degrees in psychology (BA and BS) with a wide range of courses and research opportunities covering the variety of topics and techniques relevant to an understanding of this exciting discipline.
The Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology educates students in the discipline of psychology, while providing them exposure to courses in the liberal arts and foreign languages.

A BA in Psychology prepares students for a variety of career choices. Graduates of this program work in fields specifically related to psychology such as social work, human resources, marketing, business management, and sales. The BA in Psychology is an ideal undergraduate degree for students who intend to pursue graduate training in any field of psychology (e.g., educational, counseling, clinical, social/personality). The BA supports students continuing into CSI’s Master of Arts in Mental Health Counseling program. It is also appropriate for professional schools such as law and business.
The Bachelor of Science (BS) in Psychology is a major for students who wish to take courses in the science fields. Many of our Psychology majors wish to pursue graduate study in the fields of neuroscience, medicine, and/or physical therapy. In contrast to the Bachelor of Arts, a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology requires more physiological and cognitive psychology courses, which will better prepare them for their chosen field of graduate study. The BS supports students continuing into CSI’s MS in Neuroscience, Mental Retardation, and Developmental Disabilities program. The BS is also appropriate for students pursuing Clinical Doctorates in Physical Therapy at CSI or medical school.
Faculty of the Department of Psychology

Comfort Asanbe — Psychological functioning of drug-exposed children.

Sarah Berger — Infant problem-solving skills in the context of locomotor development.

Rima Blair — Community and clinical psychology, women’s studies, internship coordinator.

Patricia Brooks — Language acquisition, cognitive development, individual differences.

Collette Chapman-Hilliard — Black/African American psychology, racial and ethnic identity development, cultural knowledge, mental health, body image and eating concerns among women of color.

Russ Clay — Social and political attitudes. Research investigates factors that predict what people believe to be “good” and “bad” in their social world.

Florette Cohen — Prejudice, stereotypes, anti-semitism, Islamophobia, voting preferences, terror management theory, mortality salience.

Peter Costa — Treatment with adolescent sex offenders, adolescent sex offenders with attachment difficulties.

Kathleen Cumiskey — Impact of technology on social interaction, queer theory, social peace and justice.

Ellen-ge Denton — Cultural impact on depression, neighborhood and negative affect, depression among vulnerable populations.

Valkiria Durán-Narucki — Environmental psychology. The physical environment of public schools and developmental, academic, and health outcomes. Social justice and how the physical environment reproduces or challenges existing social structure.

Kristen Gillespie-Lynch — Developmental psychology, autism across the lifespan, developmental predictors of adaptive skills, joint attention and language, neurodiversity, technology-based interventions.

Darryl Hill — Social psychology of sex and gender, history of psychology, gender nonconformity.


Lana Karasik — Relations between infants’ perceptual-motor and social-cognitive skills in the context of mother-infant interactions in different cultures.

John Lawrence — Trauma, coping with burns, economic and social inequality.

Dan McCloskey — Anatomical and physiological correlates of memory and emotion.

Edward Meehan — Experimental analysis of behavior and behavioral neuroscience (taurine), cognitive behavior therapy, mindfulness, animal well-being, and wisdom.

Frances A. Meléndez — Clinical psychology, health psychology, the impact of trauma, stigma, HIV/AIDS, and self-care in women of color.

Bertram O. Ploog — Experimental and applied behavior analysis, operant and classical conditioning, selective attention in autism, behavioral animal models.

Timothy Ricker — Memory, attention, and decision making processes.

Lauren Rogers-Sirin — Immigrant experiences in psychotherapy; cultural competence in psychotherapy, social justice, and psychotherapy.

Irina Sekerina — Psychology of language, bilingualism, language acquisition, eye-tracking, Russian.

Nan Sussman — Social psychology, cross-cultural psychology, non-verbal behavior.

Jennifer Wagner — Social and cognitive development in infancy and early childhood.
Psychologists conduct research, and graduates expecting to pursue MA and PhD programs can get valuable hands-on experience through participation in laboratory research, either through the honors program or independent studies.

To graduate with Honors in Psychology, students must have and maintain a 3.5 grade point average in their psychology courses. They must also complete an honors thesis under the supervision of a psychology faculty member. Typically, theses are research projects that span more than one semester of work. Students then present their research at a suitable research conference or the annual CSI Undergraduate Research Conference every spring.

Students are also encouraged to pursue independent study on faculty-directed research projects or internships and field work placements in community settings.

Research Opportunities on-campus include:

Research Opportunities
Dr. Sarah Berger and her research assistants study the development of infants' problem-solving skills in the context of locomotion. Topics include the study of how infants learn to navigate around obstacles that stand between them and a goal, using infants' motor behaviors to gain insight into underlying cognitive processes.

In the lab, babies play with toys, or crawl and walk over special playground equipment, such as slopes or stairs.

A second research interest is the impact of social and contextual factors on infants' locomotor development. These include the influence of older siblings on younger siblings' development, strategies that parents use to teach locomotor methods, and the opportunities for learning that constrain infant development.
Dr. Comfort B. Asanbe, oversees the Psychological Assessment Lab, which is devoted to understanding children’s psychological functioning. In the lab, researchers utilize various psychological tests to study externalizing behaviors (aggression, ADHD, acting-out behaviors, etc.), internalizing behaviors (depression, anxiety problems, etc.), intellectual functioning, attention regulation, academic-related issues, and adaptive functioning. There is also a second stream of study that focuses on college students’ psychological health, specifically stress and coping resources.

Ongoing projects include the investigation of cognitive, behavioral, and social-emotional functioning of at-risk children due to environmental factors, and acculturative stress and psychological outcome for immigrant students. In addition, the lab provides training and nurtures an enriched learning environment for students who have interest in applied child psychology.

The lab recruits clinical and non-clinical research participants.

Dr. Asanbe is a licensed psychologist.
The Gender Lab is led by Dr. Darryl Hill. Prof. Hill’s research is focused on how historical, social, and cultural contexts shape gender and sex identities. The focus of this lab is research on the social psychology of gender and sexuality. How does gender impact sexuality and vice versa? This is the key question driving research in this lab. Students working in this lab are involved in studies on gender-variant children and adolescents, the development of gender in childhood, hatred and prejudice against gender non-conforming people, and how sexuality is influenced by being a man or a woman. Recent research has addressed what it is like to be a woman married to a man who dresses as a woman, the sexual relationships of "feminine heterosexual men," the influence of age on a woman’s feelings about her sexuality, and how gender and sexuality impacted the lives of residents at the Willowbrook State School.
The Culture and Psychology Lab is run by Dr. Nan Sussman. Over the past 30 years, Prof. Sussman’s research can be divided into four primary areas of interest related to the role of culture in shaping who we are, how we think and behave, and the psychological implications of cultural dislocations. The lab investigates culture and nonverbal behavior, especially examining cultural differences in non-verbal behavior and the intertwined roles of verbal and nonverbal behavior in conveying emotion and information; cultural transitions among sojourners, such as studying the psychological consequences of moving to another country and then returning home (sojourners studied include students, teachers, and corporate employees); immigration, acculturation, and health, especially exploring the health outcomes (body image, eating disorders, smoking attitudes and prevalence) of immigrant adjustment to the U.S.; and remigration of immigrants by investigating the global phenomenon of immigrants returning to their countries of origin with a particular emphasis on remigration to Asia.
Dr. Patricia Brooks oversees the Language Learning Lab. She specializes in the areas of language development in children, second language learning in adults, and speech production and comprehension. Research in this lab examines language learning and development, both in children acquiring their first language, and in adults acquiring a foreign language. Prof. Brooks has broad interests in individual differences in language learning, and the role of language in cognitive development. In addition to studying children with typical development, Dr. Brooks has begun testing children with language impairments in studies of word naming, word recognition, and sentence processing. She has also engaged in research to study speech perception in children with autism, using a customized video game as a technique to engage their interest and attention.
Dr. Bertam O. Ploog runs the Behavior Research Lab. Prof. Ploog is also a Board-certified Behavior Analyst. His current research focus is on behavioral animal models to study abnormal attention patterns in children with autism. He is also directly studying attention processes (including language) in these children. He studies pigeon models of selective attention, "learning-to-learn" effect, timing, and species-specific behavior. He also uses video games to study selective attention, timing, perseveration, and pitch perception in persons with autism (in collaboration with Dr. Patricia J. Brooks).

The lab recruits clinical and non-clinical research participants.
The Behavioral Neuroscience Laboratory is led by Dr. Dan McCloskey. Dr. McCloskey and the students in his lab investigate how brain activity and organization are influenced by environmental factors and behavioral experiences. Through behavioral, anatomical, and physiological methodologies, researchers study how early life experiences might cause subtle alterations in brain development that lead to lifelong learning deficits and increased likelihood of abnormal brain activity patterns. Another topic that is explored includes the relationships between social behavior and brain organization in a highly social species: the naked mole rat.
Dr. Kathleen Cumiskey runs the Social Media Lab. Prof. Cumiskey is known, worldwide, for her groundbreaking research on the impact of mobile phones on face-to-face interaction. How people make meaning of the presence of mobile technology and the psychological consequences of the use of that technology is at the crux of her work. She is currently developing a measure of people’s attitudes toward public mobile phone use, and is also investigating how mobile phones impact women’s perceptions of public safety.
Dr. Florette Cohen administers the Social and Personality Lab. Prof. Cohen’s current research is rooted within the area of social and personality psychology. Her work to date has concentrated on perception of the self and others within the framework of Terror Management Theory (TMT).

Dr. Cohen’s latest research draws on the theories of general prejudice to specifically understand the psychological underpinnings of anti-Semitism in its various forms. Her current line of research extends the investigation to gain an understanding of the ways in which prejudice in general, and anti-Semitism in particular, have gone underground and manifest in subtle and easily masked ways.

Dr. Cohen recently extended her line of inquiry to include prejudice against Muslims, often referred to as “the other Semites.” As with anti-Semitism anti-Muslim sentiment often manifests itself subtly. Dr Cohen’s lab has been researching prejudice against women wearing the Islamic headscarf and protests against the mosque scheduled to be built near Ground Zero.
Professor John Lawrence’s research has focused primarily on the psychosocial adjustment of burn survivors. Research on the psychosocial adaptation to burns has been held back in part due to a lack of valid assessment instruments to measure specific aspects of psychological adjustment to burns. To address this issue, Prof. Lawrence led a collaboration to develop three psychometric instruments: the Satisfaction with Appearance Scale (SWAP), the Perceived Stigmatization Questionnaire (PSQ), and the Social Comfort Questionnaire (SCQ). A second focus of his research has been to investigate the epidemiology of psychosocial complications of burn injuries. In addition, Prof. Lawrence and his colleagues have tested models predicting psychosocial outcomes. Counter to a generally held assumption, burn severity measures tend to have a low correlation with body image. However, when they tested an interactional model that took into consideration how much a person values appearance, the interaction between importance of appearance and burn severity was highly predictive of body image. At present, Dr. Lawrence is in the process of broadening his research and investigating the relationship between social class, stress, and psychosocial and health outcomes in contexts other than burns.
The Social Justice in Counseling Lab researches how socio-political issues affect the process of psychotherapy and the role counseling psychology can play in fostering social justice at both the individual and societal level. Dr. Lauren Rogers-Sirin is currently conducting several studies. The first is an examination of immigrant students’ attitudes toward seeking professional, psychological help, and the types of therapy experiences immigrant students have had. Another study explores how stereotype threat may affect the therapy process. Finally, Dr. Rogers-Sirin and Dr. Frances Melendez are conducting a qualitative study on the ways that women with HIV and AIDS experience and deal with stigma regarding their diagnoses. We are also exploring the types of experiences women with this diagnosis have had with physicians and psychologists.
Experimental studies in Dr. Irina Sekerina’s Eye-Tracking and Language Processing Laboratory utilize the free-viewing eye-tracking technique to study language processing in real time. There are two ISCAN eye-trackers in the laboratory that allow researchers to monitor eye movements of different participants, such as normal adults and children, bilingual speakers, and language-impaired individuals. The main focus is on two languages, English and Russian, and the questions under investigation are:

1. What are the mechanisms underlying rapid online language comprehension and how do they develop in children?
2. Do bilingual speakers rely on two independent processing mechanisms or is the nature of the bilingual processing system universal?
At the Child Development Lab, Dr. Lana Karasik’s research is focused on the social and cultural context of perceptual-motor and social-cognitive developments in infants’ first years of life. Two key questions frame the research: (1) how infants’ changing postural and motor skills enable them to explore their surroundings, use objects, and interact with caregivers in new ways; and (2) how culture informs parenting practices, shaping mothers’ behaviors and communication that in turn affect infants’ emerging skills. Studies include laboratory assessments as well as naturalistic observations in families’ homes.
The Cognitive Development Lab is led by Dr. Jennifer Wagner. Professor Wagner’s lab uses eye-tracking and neural measures to examine early infant and child development across several areas, including social and emotional processing, learning and memory, and numerical perception. The lab studies these questions in both typically developing children and those at risk for later developmental disorders. For example, some of the work examines social cognition in infants at risk for autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in hopes of identifying early markers that might predict a later ASD diagnosis. In this context, recent work is also looking at autonomic markers of social and emotional processing during the first year of life, using measures such as pupil diameter, to see how they could relate to social development in preschool-aged children more broadly.
The Spectrum of Development Lab is led by Dr. Kristen Gillespie-Lynch. The Spectrum of Development Lab studies strengths and weaknesses associated with autism spectrum conditions across the lifespan using eye-tracking, behavioral assessments, questionnaires, online surveys, interviews, and focus groups. The lab is also developing and evaluating the effectiveness of technology to help individuals on the spectrum. Some of these technological tools include: an iPad app to help individuals on the spectrum communicate about and predict their emotions, an app to identify early signs of autism, and an online planning and social networking tool to help college students on the spectrum connect to one another and plan for the future.
In the MOSAIC Research Lab, Dr. Denton explores the socio-cultural mediators of the ethnic enclaves and depression among patients with cardiovascular disease. In particular, she examines the cultural mediators such as psychosocial risk factors (i.e., cognitive beliefs, interpersonal vulnerabilities, etc.) and unique neighborhood demographics that explain the impact of depression on subsequent cardiovascular outcomes.

Dr. Denton’s research lab also assesses cultural factors that influence depressive psychopathology among vulnerable populations (cardiovascular-diseased and orphan). Because depressive and suicide risks are increasing across the globe, this research lab is committed to studying cultural predictors of depressive psychopathology.
Dr. Timothy Ricker and the students working in the Memory and Decision Making Laboratory investigate processes related to forgetting and memory capacity, especially in short-term memory situations. The influences of time, attention, and multitasking are a particular focus of the lab in determining the limits of human memory. Dr. Ricker also investigates the influence of memory limitations on delayed decision making. Everyday decisions, such as which outfit to buy, whether or not to take a trip, or what medical treatment to get, involve integrating several sources of information over time when making the best decision. The Memory and Decision Making Laboratory investigates how memory limitations can lead to poor decision making across a range of situations.