



Applied Psychology-Human Development Division
University of Pennsylvania
3700 Walnut Street
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Interdisciplinary Studies in Human Development (ISHD) Ph.D. Program Prospective Student - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Application Questions

What are the admissions requirements for the program?

Please see the [application instructions](#) for detailed instructions. The ideal candidate has a Master's or undergraduate degree in Psychology or Social Science and a strong interest in understanding and promoting resilient development. A Master's degree and related research experience are recommended. If you have any questions about the application material or submitting the application, please reach out to the GSE Admissions Office at admissions@gse.upenn.edu or (215) 898-6415.

Is there a cut off test score or GPA?

No, there is no minimum test score or GPA - your application will be reviewed holistically. However, to get a sense of the average test scores for current Penn GSE students, please see the [GSE Class Profile](#).

When should I apply?

Applications open up in the fall. Online applications and all supplemental materials must be received by the [deadline](#) to be guaranteed faculty review.

Is part-time available?

Part-time is not available for ISHD doctoral students.

Campus Visits and Information Sessions

If I would like to visit the campus, who should I contact?

Please see the [Penn GSE Campus Visit page](#) for information on visiting the campus.

Where can I find information about information sessions?

Please see the [Admissions Events page](#) for information about upcoming events and to RSVP.

Program of Study Questions

What is the goal of the program?

The goal of the Interdisciplinary Studies in Human Development (ISHD) doctoral program is to provide students with a strong foundation in developmental theory and research from interdisciplinary and life-span perspectives. The program prepares students for careers in research and tenure-track positions in academia. It is not designed primarily for applied careers in clinical psychology. The program offers opportunities for students to explore social, emotional,

and cognitive aspects of human development from infancy to adulthood. Students learn about the processes of developmental growth and change in educational and sociocultural contexts. Students receive training for high quality research in human development using rigorous methodologies through participating in research projects with faculty mentors and coursework. In addition, students are encouraged to engage in collaborative research with faculty and students across areas and departments.

Who are the faculty advisors?

All students are paired with a member of the standing faculty in a “mentorship” or “apprentice” model for the duration of their studies. The ISHD Ph.D. program is highly flexible inasmuch as doctoral students can tailor their studies to suit their interests IF it also fits closely with the research interests of one or more of the members of the standing faculty. Successful applicants are those who are able to demonstrate how their research interests will dovetail with a particular faculty member's research portfolio. The faculty advisors are Drs. [Xinyin Chen](#), [Doug Frye](#), [Mike Nakkula](#), [Howard Stevenson](#), and [Dan Wagner](#). Other faculty members can serve on dissertation committees but cannot act as primary advisors.

What are the required courses?

The Ph.D. in ISHD requires 20 courses. Each student follows an individualized planned program of study which is determined by the student with the primary faculty advisor. Students are encouraged to choose appropriate courses with affiliated faculty in departments such as sociology, psychology, pediatrics, or others, in accordance with the student's own emerging research interests and suggestions from faculty advisors. Students can take graduate-level (500+) courses at any of the schools across the University of Pennsylvania, as long they have permission for the course from the department in which the course is housed. Students check with their advisor on their course selections.

Core courses include:

EDUC 561 Adolescent Development
EDUC 562 Personality & Social Development
EDUC 568 Cognitive Development
EDUC 610 Cultural Perspectives on Human Development
EDUC 667 Introductory Statistics for Educational Research
EDUC 682 Qualitative Modes of Inquiry
EDUC 767 Regression and Analysis of Variance
EDUC 860 Proseminar in ISHD

Where can I find information about Penn GSE courses as well other graduate-level courses that are being offered across the University of Pennsylvania?

Please see the [Penn Course Roster](#) for a list of courses that are offer in each semester. The Course Timetable for the Penn Graduate School of Education is under “Education.” Please see the [Penn Course Register](#) for a description of courses.

What is the typical course load?

Students receive full tuition for up to eight courses for the academic year. Students typically take 4 courses in the fall and 4 courses in the spring.

Are there other requirements in addition to the 20 courses?

Students are required to do research apprenticeships 20 hours per week during the academic year, working with faculty on their research. The explicit goal of the apprenticeship is to publish, initially co-authored but building toward increasingly more independent work.

What are the milestones of the program?

Students are expected to complete the Ph.D. comprehensive examination, write and defend dissertation proposal, and write and defend their dissertation. For more information, please see the [Ph.D. degree requirements](#).

What is the typical length of the program?

The length of the program depends on the amount of time it takes the student to complete the 20 courses and milestones. Since it is possible to transfer up to 8 courses from the master's degree with the advisor's approval, some students complete their coursework sooner than others. However, it typically takes a student 2.5 years to complete their coursework. Students then go on to complete the milestones mentioned above. The University's maximum time limit for completion is ten years after matriculation.

Funding Questions

What kind of support do ISHD doctoral students receive?

Our doctoral students receive four years of tuition, stipend, and health care support.

Can doctoral students hold any other employment while in the program?

Doctoral students are expected to devote their full attention to graduate study and may not hold any other employment, either internal or external to the University, while receiving funding. Please reach out to GSE Financial Aid Office at finaid@gse.upenn.edu or (215) 898-6415 if you have any additional questions.

Other Miscellaneous Questions

How many students matriculate into the program every year?

There are 2-4 students who matriculate into the ISHD Ph.D. program.

What are the demographics of GSE students?

Please see the [GSE class profile](#). Some of the countries represented in the ISHD Ph.D. program include the United States, China, South Korea, and Bangladesh.

What careers do graduates seek?

Our graduates typically seek careers in research and academic positions. Please see the [ISHD Ph.D. web page](#) for a list of where some of our graduates are now.

Are there opportunities to speak with current students and/or alumni?

Our current students and alumni participate in Penn GSE Admissions Events, such as on-campus Open Houses or on-line information sessions, to speak with prospective students. Please see the [Penn GSE Admissions Events](#) page for more information.