Human Development is a multidisciplinary field that provides a strong foundation in the behavioral sciences while exploring the social, cultural, biological, and psychological development of humans across the life course. Students study the processes and mechanisms of growth and change throughout the life cycle and how experiences and social factors affect development. Coursework is organized into five areas of specialization: Aging and Health; Cognitive Development; Human Developmental Behavioral Neuroscience; Psychology, Law, and Human Development; and Social and Personality Development. An important emphasis is the role that social factors such as schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, and culture play in human development, as well as the influence that developing humans have on their environment.

Courses in Human Development cover a range of issues and approaches, and are organized into two areas: Mind, Health, and Behavior, which is focused on the social aspects of human development, and Cognition, Brain, and Behavior, which is focused on the biological and cognitive aspects of development. Students will pursue coursework in each area and are encouraged to then specialize in one of five areas including Aging and Health; Cognitive Development; Human Behavioral Neuroscience; Law, Psychology, and Human Development; and Social and Personality Development.

The college’s liberal arts-based requirements include the social and natural sciences, humanities, writing, and statistics. Human Development students build on foundation courses that cover Infancy and Childhood (HD 1150) and Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood (HD 1170).

Program highlights: Diet and Disease | Economic and global influences on human health | Human health and nutrition | Nutrition and fitness counseling | Nutrition and public health | Nutritional biochemistry | Social influences on human nutrition.

Sample Courses in Human Development

**Human Development: Adulthood and Aging** introduces students to theories and research in adult development and aging. Describes biological, psychological and social changes from youth through late adulthood. Identifies strategies to promote healthy aging at the individual and societal level.

**Neurochemistry of Human Behavior** focuses on the complex interactions between neurochemicals and their receptors (pharmacodynamics) that drive human behavior. It will provide an overview of the principles of neurotransmission of chemicals as well as how alterations in their normal function can manifest in pathological behavior/mind processes.

**Cultural Psychology** focuses on the cutting-edge research from the recently emerged, exciting field of cultural psychology. We discuss major theories and findings that integrate cultural perspectives into psychology, and consider methodological issues unique for studying the role of culture in psychological processes and functioning. Drawing on recent work in social psychology, developmental psychology, cognitive psychology, environmental psychology, and cultural anthropology, we consider a variety of topics (e.g., cognition, conceptual systems, the self, morality, emotion, epistemologies, environmental thought) from cultural perspectives.

**Psychology of Gender** explores psychological research on gender, examining the interactions between biology and social learning, gender identity, stereotypes, gender non-conformity, and discrimination. We will critically evaluate sex-related comparisons in cognition, attitudes, leadership, close relationships, psychological development, achievement, communication, and health. We will engage with course material using an intersectional approach that acknowledges that gender development and expression are deeply impacted by race, social class, sexuality, and culture.

College of Human Ecology: Responding to Human Needs

Cornell University’s College of Human Ecology is devoted to the comprehensive study of the human experience from scientific, social and design perspectives. We view contemporary society through a wide-angle lens – exploring the human dimensions of social and natural sciences, design and the built environment, nutrition and health, public policy, society, family, and community – to address contemporary and emerging societal challenges. Our education lends itself to a range of career choices and directions, including those that have yet to be created. The paths our graduates choose are diverse, but they are linked by their focus on human issues.
Professional Pathways

Human Development majors gain excellent preparation for rewarding careers in advocacy, business, clinical psychology and other mental-health professions, education, law, medicine (particularly pediatrics, geriatrics, and psychiatry) and other health-related professions, and not-for-profit management. The major also provides a solid foundation for those planning to pursue academic careers in human development, psychology, or sociology. Students can prepare for professional degree programs, including those in medicine, dentistry, law, public health, clinical and counseling psychology, education, and business, as well as for immediate employment, through an area of specialization listed above. Those pursuing pre-med will add calculus, physics, chemistry, and additional biology courses to their schedules.

Field Placements

In addition to study-away programs, Human Development majors can arrange field placements in local agencies and institutions. Recent placements have included projects with: Tompkins County Office of Aging; Tompkins County Human Service Coalition; Tompkins County Youth Bureau; Kendal of Ithaca; local schools; and Citizens Concerned for Children, Inc.

Laboratory Courses

Human Development students may earn credit toward the major by taking courses designed to teach laboratory and other research techniques, including study design, data collection, and data analysis.

One-Year Master’s Degree

The Department of Human Development offers a one-year master’s degree that can be treated as an extension of a four-year undergraduate degree or that can stand alone.

Research

The department’s faculty research provides an expansive view of human development and includes issues such as the neurobiological basis of personality, the role of childhood attachments in the development of adult romantic relationships, the acquisition of language in infants, the effects of environmental stressors on children’s cognitive development, interventions to prevent and mitigate the impacts of child maltreatment, risk-taking during adolescence, risk and resilience factors affecting reactivity to stress across the life course, memory and the legal system, the epidemiology of elder mistreatment, healthcare decision-making among older people, and strategies to prevent social isolation and promote social integration across the life course.

Experiential opportunities

Beyond the required course work, students may take advantage of many other educational opportunities, most of which involve working with Cornell faculty members or other professionals.

Student research examples

Quisque porta urna in lacinia consectetur. Aenean at metus ex. Cras aliquam risus nisl, sed lobortis mi luctus et. Nulla lectus libero, viverra vel malesuada nec, luctus sed nisl. semper eu tortor.

Honors Program

The Honors Program is designed to give talented Human Development undergraduates the opportunity to formulate and carry out an independent research investigation under the supervision of a member of HD departmental faculty. The Program provides excellent preparation for graduate work in psychology, sociology, neuroscience, medicine and related fields. Students apply to the Honors program during the first semester of their junior year.

Student internship examples

Cornell Cooperative Extension; Intern; Ithaca, NY
Harbor Entertainment; Intern; New York, NY

Sample career paths

Assistant professor of psychiatry, University of Maryland School of Medicine, Baltimore, Maryland
Attorney, Fitzmaurice & Freeman, Stamford, Connecticut
Business analyst, Deloitte Consulting, Washington, D.C.
Communications adviser, DKT Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia
Health policy analyst, Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C.
Medical doctor, Winthrop University Hospital, Mineola, New York
Psychologist and coordinator of family support service programs, Metropolitan Hospital Center, New York, New York
Researcher, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland
Senior Scientist, Braceland Center for Mental Health and Aging, Hartford, Connecticut