

## Postgraduate programme in Applied Behaviour Analysis Information for applicants

### Introduction

“Applied behaviour analysis (ABA) is the science in which procedures [usually] derived from the principles of behaviour are systematically applied to improve socially significant behaviour to a meaningful degree, and to demonstrate experimentally that the procedures employed were responsible for the improvement ...”<sup>1</sup>. The effectiveness of ABA has been shown in a wide range of areas including education, special education, dementia care, organisational management, parent training, occupational safety, sports psychology, and clinical psychology. ABA is often recommended as the best-practice approach for working with people with intellectual disabilities (mental retardation) and/or pervasive development disorders (e.g. autism). Behaviour analytic methods can be used to evaluate almost any treatment/intervention.



Worldwide demand for competent behaviour analysts exceeds current supply, especially in the education of, and remediation of behavioural problems in, children with pervasive development such as autism. The Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) administers the international professional certification process for behaviour analysts ([www.bacb.com](http://www.bacb.com)). The programme offered in the School of Psychology at The University of Auckland was, in 2002, the first outside the USA to obtain course sequence approval from the BACB. We offer one-, two- and three- year programmes of postgraduate study in ABA. The 3-year programme meets the *educational* requirements of the BACB professional credential Board Certified Behaviour Analyst (BCBA). Since 2006, our BACB-approved practicum courses are accepted toward the BCBA eligibility requirements in the Supervised Independent Fieldwork experience category. Successful completion of the three-year programme will also make a graduate eligible to apply to the New Zealand Psychologists Board (NZPB) to be a Registered Psychologist ([www.regboards.co.nz/psychologists](http://www.regboards.co.nz/psychologists)). In 2011 the ABA programme obtained NZPB accreditation until 2018.

The hours of classroom instruction approved by BACB range from 144+ (one- and two-year programmes) to 270+ (three-year programme). The three-year programme includes a 1500-hour supervised practicum for eligibility for BCBA certification and NZPB registration.

Those who will benefit most from the ABA programme start with a bachelor's degree in Psychology including undergraduate level knowledge about behaviour analysis (or learning), have a commitment to using scientifically-supported interventions to improve people's lives, and have practical experience in service-providing agencies.

### Programme Structure

This programme satisfies the regulations for a number of degrees and diplomas and requires that a student enrol in a different degree or diploma each year. Consequently, students can undertake one, two or three years of full-time study and earn a new qualification each year. In addition, this structure offers the flexibility to accommodate students who have already completed other postgraduate qualifications. (See more details under *Individualised Programmes* below). The degrees/diplomas and courses in which students should enrol are described below.

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<sup>1</sup> Cooper, J.O., Heron, T.E., & Heward, W.L. (2007). *Applied behaviour analysis* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson

## Year 1

First year students with a Bachelor of Arts (BA) and a major in Psychology should apply to enrol in the Postgraduate Diploma of Arts (PGDipArts). Those with a Bachelor of Science (BSc) and a major in Psychology should enrol in the Postgraduate Diploma of Science (PGDipSci)<sup>2</sup>. Both the PGDipArts and the PGDipSci require a full-time<sup>3</sup> student to enrol in courses that have a total value of 120 points. To meet BACB requirements, students must enrol in at least 105 points from the Year 1 *essential* courses listed below.

### YEAR 1 STRUCTURE

#### Essential core courses

PSYCH 750	Applied Behaviour Analysis: Methods	30 points
PSYCH 751	Applied Behaviour Analysis: Behaviour Modification	30 points
PSYCH 754	Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities	15 points
PSYCH 711	Advanced Topics in Learning and Behaviour	30 points

**Plus**, 15 points from another 700-level Psychology course: Some of our graduates recommend selecting a Semester 1 course to balance work and exam loads across the year.

Graduates of Year 1 will have earned either the PGDipArts or the PGDipSci.

### YEAR 1 COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

Lectures for some of these courses have been timetabled outside normal working hours to enable enrolment for students in full-time employment (i.e., 4.30-6.30pm). “T” indicates that the course will be taught at the Tāmaki Innovation Campus, “C” indicates that it will be taught at the City Campus. “S1” means that the course runs in Semester 1; “S2” indicates Semester 2, and “S1&S2” indicates that the course runs over two semesters.

#### **PSYCH 750 A&B (S1&S2 T) Applied Behaviour Analysis: Methods**

A study of the principles and issues involved with the observation, measurement, and functional analysis of individuals’ behaviour in applied settings. Particular emphasis will be passed on the rationale behind single-subject research designs, their application to the validation of interventions aimed at modifying behaviour, and the philosophy of Psychology underpinning ABA; namely, Radical Behaviourism. Familiarity with basic principles of learning and behaviour will be assumed. Students intending to advance in ABA are strongly recommended to choose the coursework option with an applied (practical) component.

#### **PSYCH 751 A&B (S1&S2 T) Applied Behaviour Analysis: Behaviour Modification**

A study of the techniques and issues involved with modifying individuals’ behaviour in applied settings. Appropriate and effective applications of scientific principles of learning will be taught, as will pertinent topics researched in the Experimental Analysis of Behaviour. Topics will include the application of research in associative learning, reinforcement, punishment, extinction, establishing operations, avoidance, stimulus control, and choice, for the purpose of teaching new behaviour and reducing problematic behaviour. Familiarity with basic principles of learning and behaviour will be assumed. Students intending to advance in ABA are strongly recommended to choose the coursework option with an applied (practical) component.

#### **PSYCH 754 (S1 T) Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities**

Study of the behavioural aspects, aetiologies and therapeutic interventions for disorders usually diagnosed during childhood that are associated with reduced abilities to learn. Examples include intellectual disabilities (e.g. mental retardation) and pervasive developmental disorders (e.g. autism).

#### **PSYCH 711 A&B (S1&S2 C) Advanced Topics in Learning and Behaviour**

A seminar course on advanced treatment of learning including reinforcement and stimulus control. A research-oriented approach is stressed in pure, applied and theoretical areas and in the technological application of basic principles in commercial, educational, and clinical procedures. Specific topics will be decided in consultation at the beginning of the course. Familiarity with basic principles of learning and behaviour will be assumed.

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<sup>2</sup> BSc (Hons) or BA(Hons) are alternatives to PGDipSci/Arts in exceptional circumstances – consult ABA programme staff

<sup>3</sup> Consult Javier Virues-Ortega about requirements for part-time study

## YEAR 2

Graduates from Year I can apply to enrol in the Masters-by-thesis-only toward either a Master of Science (MSc) or a Master of Arts (MA) in Psychology. This degree requires a student to conduct research and submit a thesis describing that research. The thesis is worth 120 points.

There will be regular research students' workshop/seminar sessions (including 5 x 2-hr compulsory seminar attendance) during the year arranged by ABA programme staff. These will count towards BACB coursework eligibility.

Passing the thesis is required for a Master's degree at The University of Auckland, and the BACB require that a student has a Master's degree to be eligible for certification as a BCBA. Students can, therefore, conduct thesis research that is not strictly behaviour analytic and so be supervised by any member of academic staff in the School of Psychology.

Students completing and passing the thesis will be eligible to apply for a place in the Year 3 ABA courses, or to apply for enrolment in the School of Psychology's PhD programme if they do not wish to complete the educational and experiential requirements for BCBA eligibility.

## YEAR 3

*Mission Statement: This specialised programme is designed to equip graduates with sufficient knowledge, skills and abilities in the essential elements of applied behaviour analysis to provide responsible behaviour analytic services. Responsible services are those that are effective and protect clients, the public and the professions (ABA and Psychologist) when the student graduates to their first job as a newly-qualified applied behaviour analyst and Registered Psychologist. The programme provides the rationale and skills for graduates to maintain up-to-date knowledge of the methods and procedures of applied behaviour analysis throughout their careers.*

Graduates of Year 2 can apply to enrol in the Postgraduate Diploma in Applied Psychology (PGDipAppPsych). Part-time or mid-year enrolment for Year 3 is not possible. Master's thesis taken in 2014 must be marked before start of academic year 2015.

For ABA students, this diploma requires a student to enrol in:

PSYCH 651	Practicum	60 points
PSYCH 720	Research Topic in Psychology	30 points
PSYCH 730	Professional Psychology Practice in New Zealand	15 points
PSYCH 757	Advanced Applied Behaviour Analysis	15 points

The Practicum will involve 1500 hours over 12 months of supervised practical work in settings where behaviour-analytic services are valued. The actual settings in which students work will be negotiated with each student individually, but all students will conduct practical work for at least 30 hours per week. The student's primary duties during the Practicum will involve designing, implementing and monitoring behaviour analysis programs, and/or overseeing the implementation of behaviour analysis programmes by others.

To comply with New Zealand Law, PGDipAppPsych students must apply for NZPB registration under the "Intern Psychologist" scope of practice, before commencing the Practicum. Payment for registration is the students' responsibility.

Graduates of Year 3 will have satisfied the degree, coursework and experiential requirements to sit the examination for the Board Certified Behaviour Analyst (BCBA) credential. They are eligible to apply to the NZPB for registration as a psychologist.

## YEAR 3 COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

### **PSYCH 730 (S1 T) Professional Psychology Practice in New Zealand**

This course aims to equip students with knowledge and skills required for registration as a psychologist with the New Zealand Psychologists Board. Topics include the structure and functions of the Psychologists Board/Health and Disability Commissioner, cultural competency (obligations under the Treaty of Waitangi and cultural safe practice), professional ethics (Code of Ethics for Psychologists Working in Aotearoa/New Zealand) and related legislation.

### **PSYCH 757 (S2 T) Advanced Applied Behaviour Analysis**

Advanced education and training in applied behaviour analysis (ABA) in preparation for a professional career. Topics include ethical, professional, and practical issues confronting behaviour analysts in employment; recent research in ABA and other sciences with respect to clinical, educational, and other populations with whom behaviour analysts typically work.

### **PSYCH 720 A&B (S1&S2 T) Research Topic in Psychology**

A research project undertaken under supervision and written up for presentation instead of a final examination. The project will likely be conducted in one of the settings in which a student is placed for the Practicum, and students will be required to attend weekly one-hour meetings/seminars during and between semesters.

### **PSYCH 651 A&B (S1&S2) Practicum**

Supervised experience in applied settings approved by the Head of School of Psychology for 1500 hours over 12 months.

## Individualised Programmes

Enrolment in individual courses toward a Certificate of Proficiency is available for students who already have postgraduate qualifications, have passed some behaviour-analytic courses, but require further coursework for BCBA eligibility. Students interested in the Certificate of Proficiency should email Andrea Mead ([a.mead@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:a.mead@auckland.ac.nz)) for advice prior to applying formally.

A set of undergraduate courses in Psychology can be recommended for students who wish to enrol in the Year 1 courses and have a Bachelor's degree but without a major in Psychology. These courses are known as bridging courses, and a student enrolling in these courses will enrol in a Transitional Certificate. For information about Transitional Certificate courses, email [scifac@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:scifac@auckland.ac.nz).

Study for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) can be negotiated initially between a prospective applicant and Academic staff.

## Application and Selection Processes

### **Year 1**

Applications can be made from September to November for entry in the next academic year, which starts on Monday, 29 February 2016. Forms will be available online by early September <http://www.psych.auckland.ac.nz/en/for/future-postgraduates/fp-admission-and-enrolment/fp-application-forms.html>). Completed forms should be lodged with the School before December 1, 2015. Programme staff will notify applicants of their decision by early January 2016.

Applicants wishing to enrol in Year 1 courses must have a BSc (or BA) with a major in Psychology (or other equivalent qualifications). They should complete the form titled 'Registration of Interest in Applied Behaviour Analysis' and apply via Student Services Online (the University's online enrolment system previously known as nDeva) to enrol in either the PGDip in Science or Arts. Students wanting to enrol in either the BSc(Hons) or the BA(Hons) are advised to contact the ABA programme staff before applying formally.

Most Year 1 PSYCH courses are limited to 16 students. Those applying to enrol in 105 points of ABA courses will gain preferential entry to these courses provided that their enrolment has been formally completed by mid-January 2016.

## Year 2

Acceptance into the Year 1 courses does not guarantee any particular staff member as a thesis supervisor in Year 2. A limited number of places are available for students wanting thesis supervision by staff teaching ABA courses, and students will be selected by negotiation with these staff. Nevertheless, a number of other staff are able to supervise behaviour analytic research. In fact, any member of the academic staff in the School of Psychology could supervise the research towards the thesis because this research need not be behaviour analytic in approach. Once agreement for supervision has been reached with a staff member, students should submit the MA/MSc Application form to the School prior to the due date shown on the form. This form is available online: <http://www.psych.auckland.ac.nz/en/for/future-postgraduates/fp-admission-and-enrolment/fp-application-forms.html>.

## Year 3

Entry to the PGDipAppPsych and the associated courses in Year 3 will be limited depending on the availability of supervisors for the Practicum. Students wishing to enrol in the PGDipAppPsych and the Year 3 ABA courses must have either an MSc or MA in Psychology (or other equivalent qualifications) but neither degree will guarantee a place in these courses. Applicants should apply via Student Services Online and complete the Application form for PGDipAppPsych Specialising in Applied Behaviour Analysis. This form is available online: <http://www.psych.auckland.ac.nz/en/for/future-postgraduates/fp-admission-and-enrolment/fp-application-forms.html>. Applications should be lodged with the School of Psychology before the 1<sup>st</sup> of November. Interviews will be conducted mid November with a selected number of the applicants. Applicants will be notified of the outcome before December. Students interested in the PGDipAppPsych are advised to contact the ABA programme staff for discussion before applying formally.

## Selection Criteria

Programme staff will consider an applicant's academic record, work experience, career aspirations, intended programme of study, and personal qualities when selecting students for 'reserved' places in PSYCH 750, PSYCH 751, PSYCH 754, PSYCH 711 or the Year 3 courses. Preference will be given to those signalling a commitment to seeing BACB certification and obtaining employment as a Behaviour Analyst in New Zealand. The School's affirmative action policy for Maori and Pacific Island Students will also be applied.

The selection of students for the Master's thesis in Year 2 by individual staff members is less formal than Year 1 and Year 3 selection. The factors that are usually considered by staff include the similarity between his/her and the student's research interests, how academically prepared a student is for that research, and resources available in the School or via the student for the research. It is important to note, however, that the School applies further selection criteria. The University requires a minimum GPA (grade point average) of B- for entry to Master's study

## Further Information

Further information can be obtained from the ABA Programme Director, Dr Javier Virues-Ortega (email: [j.virues-ortega@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:j.virues-ortega@auckland.ac.nz)). General enquiries about postgraduate studies in Psychology and online enrolment via Student Services Online should be directed to [psych-admintamaki@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:psych-admintamaki@auckland.ac.nz).

Graduates of universities overseas and/or those without New Zealand citizenship or permanent resident status should correspond with the International Students Office (email: [international@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:international@auckland.ac.nz); phone: +64 9 373 7599 ext. 87556). Enquiries about fees should be made to [fees@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:fees@auckland.ac.nz).

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*Although every reasonable effort is made to ensure accuracy, the information in this document is provided as a general guide only for students and is subject to alteration. All students enrolling at The University of Auckland must consult its official document, the Calendar of The University of Auckland, to ensure that they are aware of and comply with all regulations, requirements and policies.*