

# MASTER OF ARTS IN BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS

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**Student Handbook**

**Revised August 2023**

**Program Overview**

***Behavior Analysis at the University of Houston, Clear Lake***

The goal of the Master’s program in Behavior Analysis at the University of Houston, Clear Lake (UHCL) is to provide students with a foundation in behavior analysis through an integrated sequence of coursework, practicum, and research activities. Students obtain competency in the basic principles of learning and the application of these principles with particular emphasis on interventions for individuals with developmental disabilities. Practicum experiences are provided in a variety of settings, and students complete a major research project and give a community presentation prior to graduation. The program is designed to prepare scientist-practitioners who will contribute to the community as competent applied behavior analysts or who will pursue doctoral degrees in psychology or behavior analysis. Accredited by the Association for Behavior Analysis-International® Accreditation Board, the program’s course sequence and supervised experience have been verified by the Behavior Analyst Certification Board, Inc®.

In addition to the master’s degree, the program offers an undergraduate minor in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). Currently, the program has three full-time faculty members, 36 master’s students, many of whom hailed from states outside of Texas, including Wisconsin, Florida, Arizona, Nebraska, Michigan, Louisiana, and California. All faculty members are affiliated with the UHCL Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities (CADD), which provides clinical, research, and training opportunities for students.

***Our Curriculum***

For this three-year master’s program, students complete 11 courses in behavior analysis, one elective course, and practica. All of our students are required to complete at least one research project, pass a comprehensive exam, and deliver a 2-hour lecture on a behavior-analytic topic of their choice for the community (e.g., parents, teachers, professionals).

***Our Faculty***

Dr. Jennifer Fritz, who joined the faculty in 2008, is an Associate Professor. She teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in behavior analysis and serves as director of the Severe Behavior Disorders Research Clinic at CADD. She received her master’s degree in 2007 and her doctoral degree in 2008 in Psychology with a specialty in behavior analysis from the University of Florida under the direction of Dr. Brian A. Iwata. Her research involves assessment and treatment of behavior disorders, functional analysis methodology, caregiver training, developmental disabilities, and autism. Dr. Fritz’s students provide clinical services to and conduct research with children and their families through the Severe Behavior Disorders Research Clinic and the Meyer Center at Texas Children’s Hospital. Dr. Fritz has served as President for the Texas Association for Behavior Analysis, on the Program Committee for the Association for Behavior Analysis International’s autism area, on the editorial board for *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis* and as guest reviewer for *Research in Developmental Disabilities*

Dr. Sarah Lechago joined the faculty in August of 2010 and is currently an Associate Professor. She obtained her masters and doctorate degrees (2009) in psychology with an emphasis in Behavior Analysis from Western Michigan University. Prior to her arrival at UHCL, Dr. Lechago was a faculty member in the Behavior Analysis master’s program at Florida State University – Panama City (FSU-PC), from 2008-2010. Currently, Dr. Lechago teaches courses at the graduate and undergraduate level and is the director of the Verbal Behavior Clinic (VBC) at CADD. Dr. Lechago’s students serve children and adults with language and social skills deficits through the Verbal Behavior Clinic. She currently serves as the faculty advisor for the Applied Behavior Analysis Student Organization (ABASO) and is President of the Texas Association for Behavior Analysis (TxABA). She serves on the board of editors or has served on the board and as guest associate editor for *Behavior Analysis: Research and Practice, Analysis of Verbal Behavior* journal and the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis.* She has served as guest reviewer for *The Behavior Analyst, European Journal of Behavior Analysis, Education and Treatment of Children*, *Journal of Behavior Assessment and Intervention in Children*, *Behavioral Interventions*, and the *Psychological Record*. Her research interests include verbal behavior with an emphasis on mands and emergent behavior, motivating operations, treatments in autism, and teacher and parent training.

Dr. Dorothea Lerman, currently the chair of the M.A. program and director of CADD, joined the faculty at UHCL in 2004. Previously, she was on faculty in the school psychology program at Louisiana State University. She received her Ph.D. in Psychology with a specialty in behavior analysis from the University of Florida in 1995. Her areas of expertise include autism, developmental disabilities, functional analysis, teacher and parent training, and treatment of severe behavior disorders (e.g., aggression, self-injury). Dr. Lerman’s graduate students serve as behavioral consultants for several school districts in the Houston area and provide services to children and adults with autism through an on-campus clinic (ABA-SkIP; Vocational Services; Connecting to College). Dr. Lerman is the past President of the Texas Association for Behavior Analysis. She has published more than 80 research articles and chapters, was the founding Editor of *Behavior Analysis in Practice*, and was the Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*.

***Our Research, Practica, and Graduate Assistantship Opportunities***

The program offers a variety of practica placements in school and clinic settings, and the majority of students receive paid experience for the entire duration of their enrollment in the program. Students may select from a number of program-affiliated sites in the Houston community, where their experiences are supervised by approved BCBAs. The program also offers a number of university-affiliated practica that provide graduate assistantships for our students. Students with graduate assistantships provide clinical services to local school districts and clinics and participate in clinical and research activities through the CADD. These placements provide a unique opportunity for students to gain practical experience in the assessment and treatment of behavior disorders, development and implementation of skill acquisition programs, and the training of other professionals to implement effective interventions.

CADD currently has seven primary programs: (1) *ABA-SkIP (Applied Behavior Analysis-Skills Intervention Program)* is a state-funded program directed by Dr. Lerman that provides services to children and teens with autism between the ages of 3 and 15 years. As part of their practicum requirement, graduate students develop and implement behavioral interventions under the supervision of faculty. The interventions are designed to reduce problem behaviors and to develop age-appropriate social, self-help, school readiness and language skills. Family members, teachers, and other caregivers also learn how to continue the training methods at home and school. Research related to assessment and is intervention is conducted within the context of clinical services. (2) *The Severe Behavior Disorders Research Clinic*, which was established in Fall 2008, is directed by Dr. Fritz. This outpatient clinic serves as a training site for graduate and undergraduate students in Behavior Analysis and General Psychology who are interested in gaining experience in the assessment and treatment of behavior disorders. Children of all ages and with various diagnoses who engage in problem behavior are served through the clinic. Dr. Fritz and her students also conduct research related to assessment and treatment of problem behavior, caregiver training, and skill acquisition. (3) *The Verbal Behavior Clinic (VBC),* which opened its doors in January of 2011, is directed by Dr. Lechago. The VBC functions as a training site for the graduate students of the Behavior Analysis master’s program, where they can refine their clinical skills, with special emphasis on the assessment and treatment of verbal behavior and social skills deficits. Undergraduate psychology students, graduate students from psychology programs outside of Behavior Analysis, and Behavior Analysis graduate students participate as therapist assistants in the clinic. The clinic provides services to individuals with developmental disabilities and their families and serves individuals from infancy to young adulthood. The primary focus of the clinic is to provide caregiver training using Behavioral Skills Training (BST; Miltenberger, 2008). Graduate students also have the opportunity to develop original research studies focusing on verbal behavior or social skills training within the context of the verbal behavior clinic. (4) *Connecting the Dots* (CTD), directed by Drs. Fritz and Lechago, is a state-funded, hands-on caregiver-training program focused on communication and behavior management of individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder ages 2 years - 18 years. Treatment focuses on decreasing problem behavior and increasing language and/or social skills simultaneously. Each family receives up to 12, two-hour individual sessions, participate in five Saturday morning group lectures called, “Behavior over Breakfast”. (5) *School Consultation –* Graduate students provide behavioral assessment, intervention, and consultation services to local school districts under the supervision of district-employed BCBA’s and Dr. Lerman. Students of all ages and disabilities are referred for services related to problem behavior and learning difficulties. The focus is on teacher training and support. (6) *Vocational Skills Assessment and Training*, a program initiated in late 2012 and directed by Dr. Lerman, is provided through a contract with the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC). Individuals diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder ages 16 years and older who have difficulty obtaining or maintaining employment receive vocational assessments and short-term intervention services. Undergraduate and graduate students assist UHCL faculty with individualized assessment and intervention. In 2023, this program was expanded to include job placement services under the name the *Meah Pathway to Employment for People on the Spectrum*, (7) *Connecting to College*, launched in 2016, provides individualized supports for UHCL students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in partnership with the UHCL Student Success Center and Disability Services. Program staff also provides trainings and consultations for the wider UHCL community (faculty, staff, students) to help them better understand and support students with ASD. Graduate students provide these services and training under the supervision of Dr. Lerman.

***The Applied Behavior Analysis Student Organization***

The Applied Behavior Analysis Student Organization (ABASO) was founded in 2008. The mission of the organization is to disseminate information about current research and clinical practice in Behavior Analysis, and offer institutional and financial support to student members to attend the annual ABAI conference. The members of ABASO are primarily students in our master’s program; however, students from other graduate programs and undergraduate students are welcome to join. Currently, the organization is supervised by Dr. Lechago and has many student members. Some of ABASO’s goals for this coming school year include organizing a spring autism awareness event, presenting training workshops in both the fall and spring semesters, hosting 2-3 guest speakers in the fall and spring, and fundraising activities to earn money to send active ABASO members to the annual ABAI conference. We look forward to a fun and productive year!

# MASTER OF ARTS IN BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS

**Typical Sequence of Coursework, Practicum, and Research**

**Year 1**

**Semester 1 (Fall)**

* **Coursework**

PSYC 5235 Learning Principles 3 hours

PSYC 6238 Applied Behavior Analysis 3 hours

PSYC 6338 Ethics and Professional Issues in Behavior Analysis 3 hours

* **Practicum --** Supervised experience; minimum of 20 hours per week

**Semester 2 (Spring)**

* **Coursework**

PSYC 6339 Research Methods in Behavior Analysis 3 hours

PSYC 6031 Behavioral Assessment 3 hours

Elective 3 hours

* **Practicum --** Supervised experience; minimum of 20 hours per week
* **Research –** Select research advisor by the end of Spring semester

**Year 2**

**Semester 1 (Fall)**

* **Coursework**

PSYC 6239 Behavioral Interventions 1 3 hours

PSYC 5435 Conceptual Issues in Behavior Analysis 3 hours

* **Practicum --** Supervised experience; minimum of 20 hours per week)
* **Research –** Develop research protocol; present to faculty/student for feedback)

**Semester 2 (Spring)**

* **Coursework**

PSYC 6331 Behavioral Interventions II 3 hours

PSYC 6430 Verbal Behavior 3 hours

* **Practicum -** Supervised experience; minimum of 20 hours per week
* **Research –** Obtain IRB approval; begin data collection

**Year 3**

**Semester 1 (Fall)**

* **Coursework**

PSYC 6530 Personnel Management and Supervision 3 hours

PSYC 6330 Research & Practicum in Applied Behavior Analysis 3 hours

* **Practicum** - Supervised experience; minimum of 20 hours per week
* **Research –** Continue data collection

**Semester 2 (Spring)**

* **Coursework**

PSYC 5030 Advanced Topics in the Experimental Analysis of Behavior 3 hours

PSYC 6330 Research & Practicum in Applied Behavior Analysis 3 hours

* **Practicum** -- Supervised experience; minimum of 20 hours per week
* **Research –** Finish data collection; draft and submit final paper

**Program Policies**

**Grade Requirements Policy for the Behavior Analysis Program**

Only courses in which a grade of B- or better is earned may be applied toward the Plan of Studies requirement (no “incomplete” or “in process” grades may be applied). Grades of C+ or below are not acceptable, and the course must be retaken. Students may only retake a course one time and may only retake two courses in total. Failure to maintain the GPA minimum or earning a C+ or lower in three courses will result in dismissal from the program. Further, students will not be allowed to take any other courses for which that course is a pre-requisite until the student successfully completes the course with a grade of “B-” or better. A minimum GPA of 3.00 must be maintained. Failure to maintain a 3.0 GPA will result in probation. Students will receive written notice of their probationary status explaining the reason(s) for probation and the requirements for removal from probation. Probation will typically last no longer than one long semester, but may be longer given the circumstances of a particular situation. Students will receive written notification of their placement status (academic standing) at the end of the semester. Status possibilities include removal from probation (GPA currently meets standards), continued probation (GPA still doesn’t meet standards but is closer to the 3.0 GPA than at the beginning of the probationary period) or dismissal from the Behavior Analysis Program (GPA doesn’t meet standards and no satisfactory progress has occurred).

**Leave of Absence Policy**

A student may be granted a leave of absence from the Behavior Analysis master’s program at the discretion of the Behavior Analysis faculty. A leave of absence may be granted during any point of a student’s involvement in the master’s program.

**Procedure to make the request**

The student is responsible for requesting an official leave of absence. A request for a leave of absence must include a reason for the request. A request can be made to one faculty member of the Behavior Analysis program in person, via email or via telephone call. However, the request for a leave of absence and final decision must be discussed and made by the entire Behavior Analysis program faculty. A request for a leave of absence will not automatically be granted by the program faculty and may be denied. The Behavior Analysis faculty has up to 2 weeks to make a decision regarding the request for the leave of absence. After a decision has been made, the student will be notified in person, via email, or by telephone regarding the outcome. The student will be required to confirm receipt of the faculty’s decision within 1 week. A student cannot terminate participation in the program (classes, assistantship, and research responsibilities) and assume a leave of absence without faculty permission. If a student assumes a leave of absence without making an official request and without faculty permission, that student will continue to be graded and evaluated as if he or she was actively participating in the program.

**Parameters of the leave of absence**

A student may take a leave of absence for up to 1 calendar year and must resume active participation in the program (classes, assistantship, and research responsibilities) no later than the beginning of the following school semester. For example, if a student requests a leave of absence halfway through the 2019 Fall school semester, the student will be required to resume active participation in the program by no later than the 2021 Spring semester. If the student does not resume active participation in the program in the first semester after 1 calendar year, he or she will be required to officially reapply for acceptance into the Behavior Analysis master’s program. (NOTE: The university requires students to reapply to the university if they have not enrolled in any courses for two long semesters). If a student has to reapply for the Behavior Analysis master’s program, acceptance into the program is not guaranteed. A student must contact the director of the Behavior Analysis master’s program at least 1 semester prior to resuming active participation in the program, so that a plan to resume activity can be developed between the student and the faculty.

**Requirements of the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB)®**

All students are expected to familiarize themselves with the standards and requirements of the BACB (see [www.bacb.com](http://www.bacb.com)) at the very start of their enrollment in the program. Ignorance of the requirements and failure to maintain necessary and accurate documentation of supervised experience may prevent a student from obtaining approval to sit for the BCBA exam.

**Practicum Requirements**

All students are required to meet the BACB supervised experience hours in a minimum of ***two different*** clinical placements prior to graduation. This requirement is intended to promote a more well-rounded practicum experience and to insure that students obtain experiences with different populations, problems, and/or intervention focuses. Students may obtain these experiences as part of a formal GA, employment, or volunteer positions. Students are encouraged to seek additional experiences with clinics and programs that would further diversify their training, particularly in areas that may be directly related to post-graduation employment interests (e.g., school settings versus hospitals; children versus adults).

**Research Requirements**

All students are required to engage in research activities prior to graduation. Students may either choose to (a) propose and conduct a new faculty-approved research project, or (b) replicate/extend an existing project in one of the faculty’s labs.  For brand-new projects, students may partner with another student in the program to conduct a joint project, with roles and responsibilities equally divided between the students.  All students must submit a final paper in APA format that describes their completed work.  In addition, all students are expected to assist with at least one student- or faculty-led research project. This latter requirement is intended to provide students with research training beyond that obtained in coursework and through their own research projects. Furthermore, students typically need the assistance of other students to complete their projects, so this requirement encourages the type of collaboration that is necessary for everyone to meet their goals.

Prior to starting their research project, all students must sign a research contract with their selected advisor that specifies the requirements for graduation (e.g., deadlines, number of subjects) and for first or co-authorship on any papers about the study that is submitted for publication. This contract should be established as early as practically possible following the selection of the research advisor. At a minimum, the contract must include the following requirements for graduation:

* The study must include at least two completed subjects.
* All research files and videos must be saved to the CADD drive in the designated folder.
* All subject information completed to date must be updated in the final manuscript with IOA reported for each subject individually if the project is not complete. If it is complete, the IOA should be reported as it would be for publication.

Students are encouraged to establish research contracts with anyone who assists with their research project. This contract should specify the expected responsibilities and the activities required for co-authorship on any subsequent presentations and publications about the study.

**University Policies**

**Academic Honesty**

All UHCL students are responsible for knowing the standards of academic honesty. Please refer to the UHCL catalog and the Student Life Handbook for the University Academic Honesty Policy. Plagiarism, that is, using research without citations, or using a created product without crediting the source, will result in a grade penalty or failure of the course. This includes self-plagiarism. You may not use the same paper for more than one course even if you modify the wording. Cheating includes copying even a single word of another student on an exam, paper, or assignment, as well as allowing another individual to complete any assignment (or any part of any assignment) for you. Furthermore, all students are expected to complete the quizzes independently. Cheating will result in a grade penalty or failure of the course. The student also must be reported to the Dean of Students.

**Anti-Discrimination Policy**

“The University of Houston System and its universities (“University”) are committed to maintaining and strengthening an educational, working and living environment where students, faculty, staff, and visitors are free from discrimination and harassment of any kind. Discrimination and harassment are antithetical to the standards and ideals of the University. The University will take appropriate action in an effort to eliminate discrimination and harassment from occurring, prevent its recurrence and address its effects. For more information, see <http://www.uh.edu/af/universityservices/policies/sam/1GenAdmin/1D7.pdf>.”

**Students with Disabilities**

“If you believe that you have a disability requiring an academic adjustment/auxiliary aid, please contact [Disability Services](http://www.uhcl.edu/disability) by phone at 281-283-2648, or email [disability@uhcl.edu](mailto:disability@uhcl.edu), or go to the office in the Student Services Building (SSCB), Room 1.302. The University of Houston System complies with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, pertaining to the provision of reasonable academic adjustments/auxiliary aids for students with a disability. In accordance with Section 504 and ADA guidelines, each University within the System strives to provide reasonable academic adjustments/auxiliary aids to students who request and require them.”

**Incompletes**

“A grade of Incomplete (‘I’) may be given at the discretion of the instructor to students who are making satisfactory progress in a course. (Satisfactory progress is defined as earning at least 80% of the possible points to that point in time.) Incompletes are typically given for emergency situations which occur after the withdrawal date but prior to the end of the semester, and which prevent the student from completing course requirements. When assigning the grade of ‘I,’ instructors must first provide students with an Incomplete Grade Contract that outlines the work to be accomplished before the ‘I’ can be converted to a final grade and specifies a deadline date.” No grades of “I” should be assigned without a completed, signed Incomplete Contract. \*\**An “I” is not an option for a student who is not satisfied with their grade after the university withdrawal date (above)*

**Sexual Misconduct Reporting and Awareness**

“The policy of UHCL is to ensure equal opportunity in all its educational programs and activities, and all terms and conditions of employment without regard to age, race, color, disability, religion, national origin, veteran's status, genetic information or sex (including pregnancy), except where such a distinction is required by law. Additionally, UHCL prohibits discrimination in all aspects of employment and educational programs on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Employees, students and visitors to campus with questions and/or complaints regarding discrimination or sexual misconduct (such as sexual violence) under Title IX may contact the Title IX Coordinator: Title IX/Equity and Diversity Office, Bayou B2323, 281-283-2305, [titleix@uhcl.edu](mailto:titleix@uhcl.edu). For more information, see [www.uhcl.edu/titleix](http://www.uhcl.edu/titleix).”

**Additional Program Information**

**Advisors**

All students are assigned a faculty academic advisor when they are accepted into the program. The academic advisor should be consulted about course scheduling, program requirements, policies, etc. We recommend that a student meet with his/her academic advisor no later than the second month of the students’ first semester in the program. Thereafter, we recommend that students touch base with their academic supervisors every semester but no less than once per year. Students should select a research advisor no later than the end of their second semester in the program.

**Plan of Study**

All students must review and sign a Plan of Study with their academic advisor no later than the second week of their enrollment in the program. The signed Plan of Study will be submitted to the College by the academic advisor. The College will send students a signed copy of the Plan, which will remain in the student’s academic file. The College will compare the student’s transcript to the Plan of Study when evaluating applications for graduation. Any deviations from the Plan of Study before a student graduates will require formal approval by the academic advisor and completion of a new Plan of Study.

**Transfer Credits**

The following is based on the university’s policies about transfer credits (<https://www.uhcl.edu/admissions/apply/graduate/exemptions-credits>). Student should discuss the possibility of transferring graduate courses in behavior analysis completed at a different institution with their academic advisors when meeting about the Plan of Study.

Graduate students must complete at least 30 hours in residence. The final 24 hours of the degree must also be taken in residence.

* No more than 12 hours can be transferred and applied toward a graduate degree program.
* Only courses with content that is equivalent to the courses required to earn the M.A. in Behavior Analysis may be transferred. The instructor of each course will determine whether the content of the previously taken course is substitutable.
* Only courses with grades of B- or higher may be transferred.
* Credits previously used towards completion of an earned graduate degree cannot be used for an additional degree.
* Courses taken more than five years prior to graduate admission may not be counted towards fulfilling the required number of hours unless approved by the Program Chair.

**Practicum Objectives**

The UHCL program has prepared a set of practicum objectives based on the most current version of the BACB task list. A copy of these objectives can be obtained from your academic advisor. Students should meet with their practicum supervisors no less than once per semester to review the objectives, establish criteria for mastery, and document items mastered. It is highly recommended for students to conduct a self-assessment before meeting with their supervisor. *Ideally, students should identify goals/priorities at the beginning of each semester and then evaluate their progress at the end of each semester.*

**Comprehensive Exam**

All students must pass a comprehensive exam as part of the requirements for Research and Practicum in Behavior Analysis. Students will take the exam during their first semester of R & P. Any student who does not pass the exam will have an opportunity to re-take it. Students who do not pass the exam will not receive a passing grade in R & P.

**BACB Coursework Eligibility**

Graduates of our program, which is accredited by the Association for Behavior Analysis International, are eligible to sit for the BCBA exam through **Pathway 1**. You demonstrate that you meet this requirement when you apply by submitting an official transcript with a conferral date for your qualifying degree. For the application and more information, visit the Behavior Analyst Certification Board Website: <http://www.bacb.com>

**Approved Supervised Experience**

* Students are required to familiarize themselves with the BACB requirements for supervised experience (new requirements for those graduating after Jan. 1, 2022) and to complete all required documentation. **Download and review the BACB eligibility requirements and the fieldwork checklist and tip sheet:**

[www.bacb.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/BCBAHandbook\_230804-a.pdf](http://www.bacb.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/BCBAHandbook_230804-a.pdf)

[www.bacb.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Fieldwork-Checklist-and-Tip-Sheet-230210-a.pdf](http://www.bacb.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Fieldwork-Checklist-and-Tip-Sheet-230210-a.pdf)

**Watch the BACB Fieldwork Documentation Tutorial (12:37)**

https://www.bacb.com/documenting-fieldwork-hours/

**Applying to Graduate – M.A. Program in Behavior Analysis**

Students must apply to graduate through E-Services by the university deadline (see academic calendar for deadline).