

Area of Emphasis: Applied Behavior Analysis

Description of Area of Emphasis: The Applied Behavior Analysis area emphasizes the application of empirically validated learning principles, behavioral conditioning techniques, and related environmental modifications to create demonstrably effective and humane outcome-based therapies with the primary goal of establishing and enhancing socially important functional independent living skills. Students and faculty in this area work on objectively defined behavioral issues across many areas including (but certainly not limited to) teaching social skills to children with autism, enhancing marital satisfaction in couples through behavioral contracting, reestablishing independent living skills in people with brain injuries, training appropriate toileting in children with enuresis, honing high-level physical performances in athletes, reducing or eliminating unwanted thoughts and actions in people with obsessive-compulsive disorder, improving medical compliance in people with illnesses, reducing depression and behavioral problems associated with mental illness, establishing effective study habits in at-risk students, and reducing repetitive habits such as nail biting and trichotillomania. Faculty supervisors provide guidance for research and clinical practice in these areas, as well as other activities related to behavior analysis.

Research Training: Research training takes place within a mentorship model. Students are paired with specific faculty members whose interests fit with the student's. Students must complete the master's thesis, qualifying paper, and/or dissertation project in an area related to Applied Behavior Analysis (e.g., autism, traumatic brain injury, behavioral medicine, modern behavioral treatments, etc.). Students typically present their findings at research conferences such as those affiliated with the Association for Behavior Analysis International, Behavior Analysis Association of Michigan, Society for Behavioral Medicine, and several others. Students are also encouraged to submit manuscripts for peer-reviewed publications. Internal sources of funding exist to support student research expenses and travel to research conferences.

Clinical Training:

Clinical training in the Applied Behavior Analysis area covers a broad range of empirically supported objective assessment and treatment approaches. Students are trained to work with adults, adolescents, and child, both individually and within family/social systems. This training involves required coursework and supervised practica experiences. In addition to the core assessment and treatment courses, which all students take, students within this area of emphasis also take a specialized course in Behavior Assessment, Applied Behavior Analysis, and other advanced courses in evidence-based therapies for children and adolescents. Opportunities to work with children with autism are offered, but the training is not limited to disability-related issues.

Beyond the classroom, students do practicum training at our own [Psychology Clinic](#). They complete a one-year practicum in-house at the Clinic, where they continue to maintain a small caseload thereafter. At the Clinic, students may request that they be assigned cases related to their area of interest when it is possible and feasible for the Clinic to do so. After a year in-house, students complete advanced practicum training at a wide range of [external practicum sites](#), such as ABA Pathways, EMU Autism Collaborative Center, Beaumont Hope Center, Clinic for Child Study at the 3rd District Court in Detroit, Family Services of Northwest Ohio, Genesee Health System Children's Autism Center, Hawthorn Center, Henry Ford Behavior Analysis, Judson Center, McCaskill Family Services, McLaren Flint Family Medicine, Novel Responses, PsychSystems, Starr Commonwealth, Sunfield Center, The Guidance Center, Thriving Minds Behavioral Health, University of Michigan Mary Rackham Institute, University of Michigan Pediatric Psychology, University Pediatricians Autism

Center. The Behavior Analysis Association of Michigan is sponsored by the Psychology Department, and there are significant opportunities for participation for Applied Behavior Analysis students.

Courses: In addition to the core program of study taken by all students, those in the Applied Behavior Analysis area take additional courses relevant to this area of emphasis including Applied Behavior Analysis, Experimental Analysis of Behavior, Evidence-Based Therapies for Children and Adolescents, Advanced Child Assessment, as well as a number of other electives such as Clinical Ecological Psychology and Modern Behavior Therapies. A student's choice of core courses and electives is made in consultation with the faculty mentor. Behavioral faculty members encourage behavioral students to be well trained and educated not just in their core areas, but to learn about the perspectives and content of any areas that they might come in contact with in their professional activities.

Affiliated Faculty and Related Interests:

[Michelle Byrd, Ph.D.](#) (Child Clinical and Pediatric Psychology) – Integration of behavioral and medical care in pediatric healthcare settings, parent training programs, the incorporation of acceptance-based strategies in the treatment of medically ill populations.

[Claudia Drossel, Ph.D., Ph.D.](#) (Adult Assessment, ABA-Behavioral Gerontology, Clinical-Adult, and Health Psychology) – Adult assessment; modern behavior therapies for individuals at the intersection of medical and emotional difficulties in later life; effects of drugs on behavior, emotion, and cognition; contextual solutions to prevent or reduce emotional and behavioral difficulties commonly associated with cognitive loss (e.g., from Alzheimer's disease, Lewy Body's disease, stroke, brain tumors); professional and family caregiver training.

[Ellen Koch, Ph.D.](#) (Clinical-Adult and Health Psychology) – Exposure-based treatments for PTSD as well as other anxiety disorders, behavior therapy and cognitive-behavior therapy for adult anxiety disorders, treatment outcome research, anxiety sensitivity and its relationship to other constructs predicting psychopathology, secondary prevention of psychopathology resulting from elevated anxiety sensitivity, and one-session exposure treatment for small animal phobias.

[Tamara Loverich, Ph.D.](#) (Clinical-Adult and Health Psychology) – Emotion regulation, excessive behavior, eating behavior, modern behavior therapies, multicultural therapy.

[Alexandros Maragakis, Ph.D.](#) (Clinical-Adult, Applied Behavior Analysis, and Health Psychology) – Integration of primary and behavioral health, reverse integrated care for those with serious mental illness, using behavioral principles in brief interventions, third wave psychotherapies.

[James Todd, Ph.D.](#) (Applied Behavioral Analysis) – Basic principles of behavior, behavioral treatment of autism, the analysis and exposure of pseudoscience in autism treatment, behavioral excesses such as activity anorexia and schedule-induced behavior, and history of psychology.

[Thomas Waltz, Ph.D., Ph.D.](#) (Applied Behavioral Analysis and Clinical-Adult) – Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), behavioral activation, behavioral marital therapy, Functional Analytic Psychotherapy (FAP), clinical behavior analysis, behavioral assessment, behavioral economics, implementation science.