



University
of Otago
ŌTĀKOU WHAKAIHU WAKA

Ōtautahi
Christchurch
Campus

Postgraduate opportunities in mental health and addiction



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For general information about studying at the University of Otago, Christchurch, visit:
otago.ac.nz/christchurch

For more information and the enrolment process, contact:
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otago.ac.nz/christchurch/departments/psychmed/postgraduate

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This prospectus is intended as a general guide for postgraduate students. The information provided is, as far as possible, up to date and accurate at the time of publication. The University reserves the right to add, amend or withdraw programmes and facilities, to restrict student numbers and to make any other alterations as it may deem necessary. The regulations of the University of Otago are published annually in the *University Calendar*.

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Welcome

Enhance your health career with a postgraduate qualification from the Department of Psychological Medicine at the University of Otago, Christchurch.

Our qualifications have been advancing students' careers as health workforce leaders, researchers, and teachers for over 30 years. Our postgraduate programmes are backed by our internationally recognised research, with our staff producing around 100 scientific papers per year across a broad range of mental health topics.

Expert teaching and research

- Gain an internationally recognised qualification from one of Aotearoa New Zealand's leading health sciences universities.
- Get up-to-date skills and knowledge while developing your professional networks.
- Learn from clinical experts – including nurses, clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, allied health clinicians, and people with lived experience in mental health and addiction.

Course funding

- Health workforce funding from Te Whatu Ora and Te Pou – the national workforce centre for mental health, addiction and disability – are available for some courses.
- For scholarship information, visit otago.ac.nz/scholarships

Flexible learning

- All papers are a mix of on-campus study blocks and remote learning via online resources and/or live videoconference sessions.
- Papers are 30 points each and run for a 6-month semester.
- Access to University of Otago's extensive student support services.
- Interactive small group learning (typically 8–20 students).
- Courses are structured for working professionals to fit study around other priorities.

Supportive community

- The Department of Psychological Medicine is committed to improving equity and health outcomes for Māori and Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand, and helping build a more diverse mental health and addiction workforce.
- We value the lived experience that many of our students bring to their work and study.
- Our teaching staff includes registered health practitioners with active clinical roles – so we understand the challenges of combining clinical work with postgraduate study.

Study with us

Block courses

Most papers require one or two in-person block courses, usually in Christchurch. Block courses can vary from two to four days, and attendance is generally required. They provide a deeper learning experience and allow students to foster peer-to-peer learning and professional networks.

Online teaching

In addition to block courses, several classes include supplementary online sessions – which work well for the class sizes across our papers. All classes are taught during normal working hours. To engage in these classes, you will need access to a computer with a built-in or external camera and microphone, and a stable internet connection.

Reading resources

A secure online learning platform, accessed via your browser, provides course outlines, handouts, and some reading materials. This platform is also used for submitting your assignments. Other resources, including textbooks and journal articles, are available online via the University of Otago Library.

Assessment

Assessments are tailored to the content of each paper. They may include written assignments, written and oral exams, and oral presentations. Students receive assessment and exam dates at the beginning of each course. It is the student's responsibility to ensure the timetable fits into their schedule.

STUDENT PROFILE



I am a trained anthropologist, qualitative researcher, and interpreter with a strong background in community-focused work. I currently hold three master's degrees and am now pursuing a PhD in Psychological Medicine at the University of Otago's Christchurch campus – supported by the He Whenua Taurikura PhD Scholarship. My research examines how Muslim individuals draw on faith and resilience to cope with trauma and loss following the Christchurch mosque attacks.

As a Muslim woman with a migrant background, starting doctoral study while balancing motherhood was challenging. However, the department's encouragement and support – especially in applying for the scholarship – has empowered me to pursue this meaningful work.

With a diverse supervisory team and an inclusive environment, I have grown in confidence and feel deeply connected to my research. I am committed to culturally sensitive, inclusive research that strengthens community understanding, and the Psychological Medicine Department continues to play a central role in this journey.

Fareeha Ali
PhD candidate

Planning your programme of study

Our postgraduate programme is intended for health professionals in a current clinical role, and who hold an undergraduate qualification requiring at least 3 years of full-time tertiary study.

It follows a staircase structure, starting with the Postgraduate Certificate (60 points), followed by the Postgraduate Diploma (120 points), Master of Health Sciences (240 points), and lastly, the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). Courses can be studied full or part time.



Postgraduate Certificate in Health Sciences (60 points)

The PGCertHealSc is usually completed part time over one academic year. Students undertake two 30-point papers, chosen from the department's postgraduate programme.

The certificate can be completed without endorsement, or with endorsement in one of the following specialty areas:

- Mental Health
- Addiction and Co-existing Disorders
- Forensic Mental Health
- Nursing (Specialty Mental Health)
- Perinatal Mental Health

Postgraduate Diploma in Health Sciences (120 points)

The PGDipHealSc is a 120-point qualification, equivalent to at least one year of full-time study. Students normally enrol in the postgraduate certificate programme before proceeding to the diploma. Most students will complete this qualification part time within 2–4 years while working clinically.

The PGDipHealSc can be completed without endorsement, or with endorsement in Mental Health. The latter comprises three 30-point papers from the PSME 400-level and/or NURS 400-level courses, and one other approved paper – usually a research methods paper – as this is required for students wishing to progress to a masters.

Master of Health Sciences (240 points)

The MHealSc is an advanced research qualification, requiring the equivalent of one additional year of full-time study after completing a PGDipHealSc. It can be completed without endorsement or endorsed in Mental Health. Students must have achieved at least a B average in the PGDipHealSc and obtained 30 points in research methods at NZQF Level 8 with a grade of B+ or higher.

There are two pathways to complete the Master of Health Sciences:

1. Two further approved 400-level papers and a 60-point research project with a 20,000-word dissertation.
2. A 40,000-word thesis, equivalent to one year of full-time study with supervised work on an original research project.

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

A PhD is the highest qualification offered by the University of Otago. It is a research degree requiring the generation of new knowledge and usually takes the equivalent of at least three years of full-time study. Recent PhD students have examined topics such as cognitive functioning in people with depression, the mental health effects of the Christchurch earthquakes, and the effect of cannabis on the brain using MRI imaging.

Hear from our students

STUDENT PROFILE



When I finished my honours degree in Neuroscience, I knew I wanted to continue my research career, but I wasn't sure what was next. Having already completed a summer studentship in the Psychological Medicine Department prior to my honours, I was privileged enough to return and begin my PhD.

Coming into my PhD, the Psychological Medicine Department has been incredibly supportive in helping me adjust to clinical research. I've always had a keen interest in psychiatric and mental health research, so I feel like I'm exactly where I want to be.

I'm currently researching the relationship between patient rest-activity rhythms and response to treatment in treatment-resistant depression. I'll be investigating whether early improvement in actigraphy during treatment with ketamine or ketamine plus psychotherapy is able to predict whether patients will respond or relapse after the treatment course.

I've also been working in the department as a research assistant alongside my study, researching eating disorders among Māori and rangatahi in Aotearoa. Having a range of research focuses and collaborating with people in the department has made my experience very rewarding and valuable.

Will Simcock

Ngāti Raukawa (Horowhenua/Manawatū)
PhD candidate

STUDENT PROFILE



Studying for a Postgraduate Certificate in Health Sciences with the Department of Psychological Medicine has been a great journey and has complimented my work as a clinical psychologist.

The staff – at all levels – have gone above and beyond to facilitate my learning and general curiosities, adding to the experience. The courses integrate well with my work, and the assignments are manageable and actionable within my day-to-day.

Opportunities for whakawhanaungatanga with my classmates and staff have helped me develop connections with those who also work in the mental health field – the benefits of which will extend into the future.

Bruno Unger

Clinical Psychologist

Helpful information

What's the time commitment?

Postgraduate study is stimulating and rewarding, but it requires commitment and organisation to fit around busy professional and personal lives. Time commitments vary throughout the semester, but students should expect to spend up to 20 hours per week on each 30-point paper during peak periods.

A range of teaching and learning methodologies is used to support learning. Throughout your study, conveners and administration staff are available to provide information about the services and resources available for students at Otago.

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What support is available?

otago.ac.nz/services

We have small class sizes and highly invested teaching and administrative staff. The first step for our students – in most cases – is via the course convenor or course administrator.

Postgraduate students also have access to a variety of services and support, wherever they are based, including:

- an e-learning co-ordinator to help navigate online resources
- academic advice and pastoral support from the Associate Dean (Postgraduate Studies)
- individual and group support from a student learning development adviser
- Māori and Pacific Islands student support
- Postgraduate Students' Association (PSOC)
- library services
- chaplaincy

