BREANNE HUBER
Scroll Staff

After being approved eight weeks ago, the BYU-Idaho Psychology Department is introducing a new emphasis, health psychology, said Rob Wright, an instructor in the psychology department.

Autumn Graves, a senior studying health psychology, said health psychology works toward understanding how the mind and body interact when it comes to the overlap of physiological and psychological diseases.

"The idea here is applying what we know about psychology to health and ultimately trying to improve health," Wright said.

Wright said many students may notice that they become sick during finals week. He said health psychology studies things such as stress and how it influences one's overall well-being.

Cody Broadbent, a junior studying health psychology, said health psychology works toward the improvement of environments in hospitals, schools and the workplace.

"We have all been to the doctor where we've had to wait two hours in the waiting room and had some doctors who have bad bedside manner, so I want to make it more patient-friendly," Broadbent said.

Wright said there is sometimes a gap in places such as hospitals, where people know what they should be doing to improve their health, but they don't.

"We decided this new psychology emphasis is beginning to bridge that gap.

"[Medical professionals] are gaining an appreciation for psychology, understanding why your patient doesn't do what you tell them to do," Wright said.

Graves said anyone who is even relatively interested in psychology, health or anything in the medical field should consider going into health psychology.

"It's a great field for people who want to be a trailblazer," Graves said. "It's a relatively new field, and I think there's a big need for it in the medical field. It's important to have someone who can work with doctors and nurses and also understand the psychology behind it."

Wright said while it may not be a traditional route, health psychology can be used as a pre-med major.

"It's being increasingly recognized across the nation, across the world in many respects," Wright said.

Wright said starting in January 2015, 25 percent of the Medical College Admission Test will be focused on psychology.

Broadbent said there are a variety of routes one can take even within the health psychology emphasis. He said one could take a medical route or have more of a focus on public health or health care administration.

Broadbent said he would like to become a clinical psychologist and counsel individuals who have diseases and other medical problems as well as in hospital reform.

Graves said she would like to work in a hospital environment as well as conduct research in the field before becoming a teacher of health psychology.

Wright said students within the emphasis will take the core psychology courses required of all psychology majors. The additional courses for the new emphasis come from a number of different areas of study.

"Health psychology is fun," Wright said. "It's a really neat blend we're getting in this [emphasis]."

Broadbent said that the courses he has taken cover subjects such as nutrition, biology and personal health.

Wright said it is important to understand all of these areas because of how a person's mental health can affect those areas and vice versa.

Broadbent said his favorite class is the actual health psychology class because he enjoys learning about how people react to health care and how health care administrators and patients interact.

"The research in the field is fascinating," Graves said.

Wright said while students cannot officially declare the major until the 2015-2016 calendar year, they can unofficially declare it to him and begin taking the required classes.