

# GRADUATE PROGRAM POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

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## GRADUATE STUDIES COMMITTEE

The Graduate Studies Committee (GSC) is charged with (a) developing policies relevant to graduate education in the Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences (PBS), (b) providing information to Division Heads that will assist in setting numerical admissions goals for their area, and (c) overseeing the implementation of existing PBS graduate policies and procedures. Petitions concerning exceptions to rules are heard and voted on by the Committee, as are non-termination grievance cases that have failed to be resolved via informal mediation. The GSC is composed of the Graduate Program Director (GPD), who serves as Chair, at least three faculty members appointed by the Department Chair, and at least three graduate students, elected by their peers or appointed by the GPD. GSC membership should represent the five divisions as broadly as feasible.

All cases of academic dishonesty involving graduate students enrolled in a PBS graduate program shall be referred by the instructor to the GSC for deliberation concerning consequences to the student.

GSC decisions raising substantial policy issues may be referred to the Executive Committee (EC) for further deliberation. Major policy changes must be voted on during a full Department meeting.

The Department offers programs in six major areas of specialization. Interdisciplinary programs that cut across established area and divisional boundaries can be arranged.

### Major Programs

The major areas of specialization within the Graduate program are defined as follows: [Behavioral Neuroscience](#); [Cognition and Cognitive Neuroscience](#); [Developmental Science](#), [Social Psychology](#); [Clinical Psychology](#)

### Interdivisional and Interdisciplinary Programs

#### *Interdivisional*

Most interdivisional interests are accommodated by informally working in one or more areas outside of the student's major area of specialization.

Occasionally a student has a well-defined course of study in mind that does not readily fit into the Department's current structure. For example, a student might wish to pursue a program that integrates behavioral neuroscience and developmental science. To be considered for an interdivisional program, a student is advised to apply to the area that most

closely corresponds to his/her primary research area (e.g., behavioral neuroscience or developmental science). A student should indicate on the application the nature of the program and the areas of specialization that it incorporates. Interdivisional students must be accepted by all areas of specialization within the Department that are relevant to their training

ONLY A SMALL NUMBER OF STUDENTS ARE ADMITTED INTO THIS KIND OF PROGRAM.

### *Interdisciplinary*

PBS also offers the possibility of establishing an individualized program that cuts across Departmental lines into other areas of the University. A good example of such an interdisciplinary effort is the Cognitive Science Program, which involves the Computer and Information Science, Linguistics, Philosophy, and PBS Departments. The Division in PBS that is most directly relevant to this program is the Cognition and Cognitive Neuroscience Division, although the Behavioral Neuroscience Division also offers relevant research and training. In addition to the program in Cognitive Science, PBS has collaborative arrangements with the Environmental Institute, the School of Education, and others. In considering an interdisciplinary program, students are advised to apply to the Division that most closely represents their interests, explaining in the personal statement accompanying the application the specific course of study that interests them.

### Interpretation of Rules and Petitions for Exceptions to Rules

Questions concerning interpretation of graduate program policies should be addressed to the GPD. The GPD also handles petitions for exceptions to the rules. The petitioner should justify carefully any requested exception, and a recommendation from his/her advisor and Division Head is required.

Requests for rule interpretations and petitions for exceptions are referred to the GSC if, in the judgment of the GPD, they raise issues of policy or have the potential to set major precedents for handling of similar future cases. Then a decision is made by a majority vote of the GPD. If substantial issues of policy arise by this mechanism, a case may also be referred to the EC.

## **GRADUATE ADMISSIONS**

For University Graduate Admissions information, forms, and guidelines, please see the [Graduate School Website](#).

### Departmental Procedures

Graduate admissions proceeds under the general direction of the GPD and the GSC, which sets admissions quotas or goals for the various Divisions. The Divisions in turn may establish

admissions committees according to their own area of specialization. Preliminary admission decisions are then made by Divisional area admissions committees; any of these decisions may be reviewed by the entire GSC at the request of the GPD. Only members of the PBS Graduate Faculty may make admissions decisions.

The Department utilizes an admissions policy in which initial quotas are determined by the ability of a Division to fund eligible students. Departmental resources (e.g., teaching assistantships) are distributed to each Division in proportion to the number of its graduate faculty; any additional sources of support generated by a Division are added to its allocation. In determining a Division's final quota, the GSC and Departmental Chair may consider factors other than funding (e.g., programmatic needs, student/faculty ratio, number and quality of applicants, job placement), provided that the general Departmental policy on the funding of eligible students (see below) is not abrogated.

In keeping with a commitment to the values of diversity and social change, each Division's admissions committee should work closely with the Diversity Committee to attract and recruit underrepresented groups, including ethnic minorities, women, and persons with disabilities, thereby achieving a graduate student body representing a variety of perspectives and social and cultural backgrounds.

#### Readmission

Students who withdraw from the program in good standing, or who are dismissed and who wish to be reconsidered because of extenuating circumstances, may reapply for admission later. Applications for readmission will ordinarily be considered in the spring, during the regular admission period and following standard procedures. In extraordinary circumstances, applications for readmission may be considered at other times, in which case the relevant Division will review the application and make its recommendation to the GPD and GSC.

#### **FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS**

Students receive financial support from a variety of sources, including teaching assistantships (TAs), research assistantships (RAs), traineeships (e.g., NIMH training grant), University Fellowships, as well as stipends from non-Departmental sources within and outside the University.

The amount of money associated with each of these forms of support varies, as do arrangements concerning waivers of tuition and fees. The size of TA stipends may also vary, depending on the assignment. Currently, assistantships of 10 or more hours per week each semester carry full tuition and curriculum fee waivers and 95% exemption of the costs of individual health insurance fees (90% for the family plan). The student will remain responsible for other mandatory University fees. Please see the [Graduate School](#) for current fees.

Admissions and distribution of funding are determined by each Division and recommended to the GPD who makes final decisions.

All Divisional funding plans strive to maintain the quality of the program while simultaneously seeking to provide the support necessary for the continued progress of advanced students

Please check with the individual graduate programs for their guidelines on student support: [Behavioral Neuroscience](#); [Cognition and Cognitive Neuroscience](#); [Developmental Science](#), [Social Psychology](#); [Clinical Psychology](#)

### Teaching Assistantships

TAs are stipends provided by the University for the purpose of assisting in undergraduate (and in a few cases, graduate) courses. These assignments typically involve either 10 or 20 hours of work per week over the course of a semester (approximately 15 weeks). It is important that students work the number of hours for which they are paid. It is especially important that all students work the same number of hours for the same amount of money. Faculty should be responsible in their requirements and accurate in estimating the number of hours that they need. Students should recognize that the TA assignment is a job, not a gift, and that they have a responsibility to meet their contractual obligations.

### TA Priorities

The GPD makes TA assignments according to the following current list of course priorities:

First Priority:

Psych 240 Statistics

Psych 241 Methods

Psych 392 Junior Year Writing Seminar (*this requires enrollment in Psych 891B: Teaching/Writing in Psychology*)

Psych 494 RI Interdisciplinary Directions in Psychology (Integrative Experience)

Psych 640/641 Graduate statistics courses

Second Priority: core courses required for the major, other large undergraduate courses, and intensive graduate courses

Baseline TA allotments will be 1 TA (20 hours/week) per section for all first priority courses and 1/2 TA (10 hours/week) for second priority courses. The Department normally hopes to provide at least the baseline allotment for all second priority courses, with larger courses having priority over smaller ones.

### TA Commitments/Failure to Complete TA Commitments

TAs benefit both the recipient and the Department. Acceptance of such support is regarded as a contractual agreement. The nature of this agreement is as follows:

1. Once a TA has been accepted, the graduate student is expected to complete his/her assigned duties. Faculty supervisors are responsible for informing TAs about these duties. TAs are required to be available from the beginning of the semester until the date final grades are due. Late arrivals or early departures must have faculty supervisor approval and must be discussed prior to the beginning of the semester.
2. Acceptance of a TA obligates the student for the entire period of appointment. Early termination of an assistantship by the recipient or the faculty supervisor requires approval of the GPD.
3. If a TA is thought to be performing unsatisfactorily or an instructor is believed to be treating a TA unfairly, the first level of resolution resides with the GPD. If the GPD cannot resolve the problem, the second level of resolution is with the Division that accepted the student. If required, a committee composed of Division Heads, GPD, and the Department Chair may be formed to reach a resolution. Failures to perform appropriate duties may justify withdrawal of future Department funding, withdrawal of eligibility for Continuing Education teaching assignments, and other possible actions.
4. At the end of each semester, all faculty supervisors will provide their graduate TAs and the GPD with a formal TA evaluation. This evaluation will be filed in the student's graduate file.

## **ADVISING AND EVALUATIONS**

### Relationship with Advisor

Every PBS graduate student works with an academic advisor whose primary (not adjunct) appointment is in the PBS. The student and faculty research interests and the current load on faculty will be taken into consideration when making determinations. Typically, these determinations are made within each graduate program, though consultation with the GPD and GSC is possible.

At the beginning of each year, the student and his/her advisor should agree on what they expect to be accomplished that year. This agreement includes:

- The specification of coursework appropriate to the student's interests and the Divisional and Graduate program requirements
- Setting of realistic goals with respect to research, teaching, and/or clinical

experience

- Discussion of priorities, time management, and the desired quality of performance

### Advisor-Advisee Change Policy

This policy applies to students and faculty in otherwise good standing who may wish to initiate an advisor-advisee relationship change. Programs have an obligation to mentor students in good standing through to their terminal degree, including when this requires an advisor change. Thus, the present policy is distinct from others in the P&P that bear more specifically on academic standing, statutes of limitation, termination, etc.

Given that graduate students in PBS are largely admitted to work with a specific advisor or specific co-advisors, we expect that most students will maintain their incoming advisor relationship(s) through completion of the program. During this process, there may be times when the relationship becomes strained, which may or may not precipitate a formal change. If the current goal is to preserve the relationship while changing its nature, and if you are comfortable doing so, approach your advisor or advisee directly to discuss your existing concerns. If this is a personal or relationship issue, an earnest attempt should be made to address it, or to change the relationship dynamic in a manner that allows the relationship to persist in a more acceptable and productive manner. However, if the advisor or advisee is uncomfortable initiating this conversation, they should request facilitation. The facilitator could be the Area Head, Graduate Program Director, and/or Department Chair, with the choice made by the person wishing to address the advisory relationship. If the goal remains to change the nature of the *existing* advisor-advisee relationship, the facilitator can serve as a mediator to help determine if salvaging the existing relationship is feasible for the parties involved.

However, we appreciate that there may be cases where a formal change in the advisor-advisee relationship may be considered; for example, when an advisor or advisee changes research interests, when an advisor or advisee becomes dissatisfied with the relationship, when an advisor leaves the University, or for other reasons. In these situations, the relevant participant(s) can take action to pursue a relationship change without jeopardy. Specifically, the person wishing to change the relationship can approach the Area Head to implement any existing area/division/program policies for dealing with advisor-advisees changes. If these do not exist, or if the advisor or advisee is uncomfortable approaching the Area Head (e.g., because the Head is one of the principals), then he or she should take the next action.

This action involves mediation and/or advocacy with the help of a facilitator. The facilitator could be the Area Head, Graduate Program Director, and/or Department Chair, with the choice made by the person wishing to address the advisory relationship. The facilitator works with the advisor or advisee and the relevant area/division/program to determine, among other things, the student's standing in the program, factors that influence this standing (especially if related to the advisory relationship), possible feasible alternatives for new advisors, financial support

implications and potential resolutions, etc. The facilitator can also liaise with the Graduate School to the extent that Graduate School policy and procedure are involved (e.g., formal changes to committee membership).

### Formal Student Evaluations

At the end of each year, the faculty of a Division or area must provide written feedback to students. Although the advisor's input into this evaluation is very important, the responsibility for accurate, informative, and thorough feedback is shared by all relevant faculty in a Division. Faculty within each division decide on the exact structure through which the evaluation is carried out, but the written statement must be, at a minimum, the product of evaluation conducted by more than one faculty member. The written evaluations become part of the student's graduate file (these evaluations can be housed within the Division's own filing system or with the Graduate Secretary).

It is important that faculty expectations and evaluations be expressed as clearly as possible and be responsive both to the faculty's sense of what is desirable in a UMass Ph.D. and the individual student's level of training, interests, and abilities.

### Academic Standing and Termination from the Graduate Program

The individual degree-granting programs within PBS, in concert with the Department-wide policies and procedures outlined herein, are responsible for operationalizing and communicating students' academic standing in their respective program of study. Standing reflects more than meeting milestones; it speaks to performance in the competencies and standards that programs deem necessary for the successful completion of graduate training.

At a minimum, a student's standing should be reviewed, updated, and communicated on an annual basis during the program's end-of-year student evaluation meeting. However, evaluation meetings can also be called as needed to discuss concerns about a student's standing. If remediation is needed in order to restore good standing, program faculty representatives (e.g., Advisor, program Head) should develop, document in writing, and review with the student the remediation plan, with clearly stated requirements and a timeline for returning to good standing. This plan should be submitted to the GPD who will review (and consult with others as needed) to ensure that it is reasonable and fair. Once in this state, all parties will sign the document to demonstrate understanding and begin implementation. At the end of the remediation period, the student, program representatives, and GPD should meet to determine if the documented requirements have been met satisfactorily. At this time, it would also behoove the student to consult the Graduate Employee Organization regarding potential consequences of a change in employment status.

Students who fail to achieve the goals set forth in their personal remediation plan (i.e., failure to progress) may be terminated from their graduate program. Also, students who have

otherwise been in good standing, but engage in egregious violations of ethics, exceed Departmental statutes of limitation (described below), or violate [University Policy](#) may be terminated from their graduate program without going through a remediation process. Regardless of the reason for termination, the process is initiated when the program Head submits to the student and GPD a memo of an intent to terminate, with a statement of justification. At this stage, a student may appeal their program's decision to terminate by speaking with the GPD who will assemble an Evaluation Committee composed of the GPD and all area Heads, and chaired by the Department Chair.

A student who is recommended for termination and wishes to appeal will be given a minimum of two weeks to prepare their case before meeting with the full Evaluation Committee. During this meeting, the student can present any information regarding their individual set of circumstances. This information will assist the Committee in making a fully informative and careful decision. Termination may be recommended based on numerous criteria, including, but not limited to, failure to meet deadlines, poor course performance, poor research performance, contributing to a detrimental work environment, and/or failure to make adequate progress in their graduate program. The student has a right to be represented at the evaluation meeting by a Graduate Employee Organization representative and may request participation by other supports. After the evaluation hearing, the Evaluation Committee has the power of final decision regarding the Department's recommendation to the Dean of the Graduate School (with whom the final decision to terminate resides). See the [Enrollment section of the Graduate School Handbook](#) for additional information.

## REQUIRMENTS

### Research

Early in the first semester of residence all students participate in research under the supervision of a faculty member. The student is expected to pursue his/her research interest during the first year with focus on developing topics for the Master's thesis. The student is expected to continue his/her research productivity throughout his/her graduate career, which culminates in an original scholarly dissertation.

### Teaching

Students are required to acquire teaching experience under the supervision of one or more faculty members (see Ph.D. teaching requirements). Most students acquire this experience while receiving funding from a TA. Although TA responsibilities generally involve assisting in a course taught by a faculty member, advanced students sometimes have an opportunity to teach their own courses. Most opportunities to teach one's own course arise through Continuing Education courses.

### Teaching Practicum

Occasionally a Teaching Practicum may be offered as a seminar or graduate course. However, in general, the Teaching Practicum is arranged on an individual basis, following an apprenticeship model. The Department has adopted the following policy guidelines concerning Teaching Practicum:

1. Teaching Practicum is not required.
2. Those that elect to teach a Research Methods lab may enroll in up to 3 credits of Teaching Practicum during their first semester teaching the course.
3. For those who elect Teaching Practicum for courses other than Research Methods, it will be in the form of an apprenticeship model, as follows:
  - a. The student and faculty member will develop a contract specifying the goals of the apprenticeship, including the number of credits to be earned, the inputs of the student, his/her attendance at the lectures, and any teaching seminars to be instituted, etc. The contract will be filed in the student's folder.
  - b. At the end of the semester, both parties to the contract will write evaluations and discuss them with each other. The evaluations of the student's performance will be filed in his/her folder.
4. A student need not be a paid TA to enroll in Teaching Practicum.
5. Students with good reputations or evaluations as teachers, by their performance in Teaching Practicum or in other settings, may be given priority in assignments of TAs in general and of TAs for given courses, where possible.

#### Timetable for Satisfactory Progress in Graduate Program

Students and advisors should be guided in their expectations and goals by the following the [Guidelines to Graduate Degrees](#). These guidelines below serve as a standard defining pace at which graduate students are expected to progress through their programs. Students should check with their individual program for program completion expectations.

1. Master's thesis planned during the first academic year and proposal signed no later than October of the second year.
2. Master's and core requirements completed by the end of the second academic year.
3. Comprehensive examination proposal approved by October of the third academic year.
4. Comprehensive examination completed and dissertation proposal approved no later than the end of the third academic year.
5. Dissertation completed by the end of the fourth academic year.

The Clinical Division requires 5 years in residence, with the 6<sup>th</sup> year as a predoctoral clinical internship. Thus, some of the above guidelines might need to be adjusted for clinical students.

### Statutes of Limitations

Although these guidelines define satisfactory progress in terms of the standards set by PBS, some students complete degrees in less or more than the expected time. Provided that a student's advisor and Divisional faculty agree to an extended program, it is possible for students to complete the program at a slower pace than specified by the guidelines. Time limits are set by the advisor and the Divisional faculty, but may not exceed those specified by the Statutes of Limitations (SOL).

The SOL is the time period in which all degree requirements must be completed. For doctoral students admitted after the Summer 2009, the SOL set by the [Graduate School](#) is six (6) years prior to achieving candidacy and five (5) years once candidacy is achieved. For students entering the program already possessing a Master's degree in psychology, the statute is four years. Please note these statutes include the time required for the clinical internship. The Graduate School also has a three-year statute of limitations for completion of the Master's degree.

Petitions for extensions of any of the above statutes are initiated by a student's Division Head on his/her behalf. The petition is sent to the GPD. The GPD makes the final decision regarding an extension on any of the above statutes and informs the Dean of the Graduate School of such approval. SOL requests are now submitted directly from Departments via SPIRE (click [here](#) for instructions). The Dean of the Graduate School must approve any extension after the GPD provides supporting approval.

### Leaves of Absence

Provided that a student is granted a formal leave of absence from the program, leave-time is not counted against the above statutes of limitations. The procedure for being granted a leave is as follows:

- The student petitions his or her Division Head for a general leave. Note that students can also petition for a *medical* leave, but this will require medical documentation to be evaluated by University Health Services.
- If the Division Head approves it, he or she writes a memo to the GPD rationalizing and supporting the leave (general or medical).
- If the GPD approves, he or she sends the now approved and signed memo to the Dean or Associate Dean of the Graduate School, who makes the final decision concerning the granting of the leave.

The [Graduate School's policy](#) is to grant leaves only if they are justified. While on leave, students must pay the continuous enrollment fee, unless a successful case has been made for the Graduate School to waive the fee (in the aforementioned memo) due to the serious nature of an injury, family emergency, etc. Without this formal waiver, failure to remain on program fees means that the student must reapply to the Graduate School for admission to the Department.

## **REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MASTER'S DEGREE**

A Master's degree in PBS must be earned before going on to the Ph.D. A minimum of 30 credits is required for the Master's degree, 21 of which must be in PBS, including 6 in statistics (see below). A minimum of 16 credits must be on a letter-graded basis. A Master's thesis must be completed, and an oral examination (based primarily on, but not limited to, the thesis) must be passed. A minimum of 1 research credit is required, and a maximum of 10 research credits (Psychology 699) are allowed toward the Master's degree. The Master's degree cannot be awarded unless a student's cumulative grade point average is 3.0 or higher.

Divisions and specialized programs may set additional requirements for the award of the Master's degree. These requirements are outlined in each Division's Policies and Procedures.

### *Requirements for Master's Degree: Transfer Students*

A Master's degree obtained at another university may satisfy the requirements for holding a Master's degree in PBS before proceeding to the Ph.D. if the student demonstrates (1) that training obtained through coursework elsewhere is comparable to training obtained in our Master's program, and (2) that a Master's thesis project was completed that is comparable to projects in our Master's program. The GSC, with the advice of the student's Division Head and advisor, will determine whether these two conditions have been fulfilled.

Determinations of these two conditions are independent and the student may remedy a negative determination of the thesis requirement by completing the equivalent of a Master's thesis project (Psychology 699) in this Department or remedy a negative determination of the coursework requirement by completing a program of study at UMass that meets the approval of the GSC.

The substitution of a Master's thesis from another university will not permit the receipt of a University of Massachusetts degree; approval of a non-University thesis merely allows a transfer student to proceed to the Ph.D. if the other requirements for a Master's thesis are fulfilled.

### **Steps to Completing a Master's Degree**

Each student carries out a Master's thesis under the direction of a Master's Committee. To set up a Master's Committee, a student generally starts with an area of interest or a specific

problem within psychology and then finds a faculty member with similar interests to chair the committee. However, some students start with a faculty member with whom they would like to work and tie into that faculty member's area of interest.

### *Master's Committee*

According to Departmental policy, the Master's Committee consists of three or more members of the Graduate Faculty. At least two of the Department's areas of specialization must be represented on the Committee. Areas are defined as [Behavioral Neuroscience](#); [Cognition and Cognitive Neuroscience](#); [Developmental Science](#), [Social Psychology](#); [Clinical Psychology](#). However, if one Committee member is chosen from outside the Department, only one of the Psychology Department's areas need be represented. This modification of the "two area rule" can only be granted if the specialization of the outside member is not the same as that of the other committee members. Ordinarily, a student's own area of specialization is represented by at least one member of the Committee, and usually the Chair is from the student's own area. However, with the approval of a student's Division Head, the Chair, as well as all of the other Committee members, can be chosen from outside of the area. At least two members of the Committee must have their primary appointment in the PBS Department.

Five College Graduate Faculty and adjunct Graduate Faculty may serve, but not chair, Master's Committees with the approval of the GPD.

Emeritus faculty can serve on committees; however, the retired faculty member would need to write a memo to the Graduate School Dean's Office stating that he or she is planning to serve as a committee member, and that he or she will be at all meetings and participating fully.

Exceptions to these rules are handled by petition to the GPD.

Once members of the Master's Committee are selected and agree to serve, the Committee Chair submits a request to the GPD to appoint the Committee, naming him/herself as Chair. If the GPD approves the Committee membership, he or she will submit a formal nomination to the Dean of the Graduate School, who has the ultimate authority in the appointment of Masters Committees. It is understood that faculty members nominated for appointment to a Master's Committee have already agreed to serve in that capacity.

### *Master's Proposal*

Traditionally the Master's proposal consists of a review of the literature relevant to the research problem and a statement of the methodology proposed for the project. Because the proposal is considered a contract between the student and his/her Committee, it is necessary for the Committee to formally approve it. After the student has met with his or her Committee to discuss the proposal and the proposal has been approved, the Committee Chair should submit a memo to the GPD stating such. This memo will become part of the student's Departmental

graduate file.

Note that the Graduate School policy states, “A master’s candidate must prepare a suitable thesis outline to be approved and signed on the cover sheet, by each member of the approved Thesis Committee and the Graduate Program Director or Department Head/Chair. The signed copy of the thesis outline is forwarded to the Graduate Student Service Center for inclusion in the candidate’s file, at least four (4) months prior to the date that the thesis defense is scheduled.” *However*, in practice, no outline or cover sheet (i.e., title page with committee member/Department Chair signatures) needs to be submitted to the Graduate School. They will accept these documents, but they are NOT required. Also, the 4-month rule is not enforced by the Graduate School; it is assumed that the Department has waived this requirement if the student defends earlier than 4 months after the proposal.

### *Master’s Research*

Modest Departmental funds (generally about \$300) are available to aid students in carrying out their Master’s thesis research. Students will be eligible for these one-time funds only if they are working with a member of the PBS Department. This money can be used for direct research costs (e.g., paying subjects, purchasing equipment, etc.). To request this financial aid, the student should complete the relevant form, *Applying for Masters and Dissertation Research Funds*, on the PSB [Intranet Site](#).

Please be aware that the University Institutional Review Board must approve all research. If the proposed Master’s research involves the use of human subjects in any context, a student must receive permission from the Departmental Human Subjects Committee before recruiting subjects.

### *Final Oral Examination*

When a student has completed the Master’s thesis, he or she will take a general “defense of thesis” examination (aka “orals”). This examination need not be limited to the thesis topic. The thesis itself must be approved and the final oral examination voted “pass” by all members of the Master’s Committee. All committee members and the Department Chair must sign the thesis as “approved” (these “wet” signatures should be placed on the signature page that meets the Graduate School formatting and page specifications, as discussed further below). Also, the Committee Chair submits a memo to the GPD indicating that the approved committee passed the oral exam on the specific date. If there are no issues, the GPD approves and signs the memo and sends it to the Graduate School for final approval and archiving.

### *Scheduling of Master’s Orals*

Four weeks before the orals, the Graduate Secretary must be informed of the time, place, and date of the exam, as well as the title of the thesis, for publication via email to Department

members. A part of the oral examination, namely the presentation of the thesis work by the candidate, is considered public and faculty and graduate students are invited to attend.

Orals should not be scheduled during summer months unless absolutely necessary. The Department policy relevant to that is as follows:

In planning their research schedules, students should not expect faculty to provide intensive research supervision or to schedule their orals during the summer months. It is expected that thesis, comps, and dissertation meetings will be held during the academic year and that students will plan accordingly. Exceptions to this pattern are at the discretion of the particular faculty involved, and must be negotiated well in advance. Since [Graduate School deadlines](#) are at the end of August, the Department will consider the deadline for completing the master's thesis to be the end of the spring semester. Orals will be scheduled beyond this time only with the permission of the thesis chair and committee members.

As noted previously, although the Graduate School still officially requires that 4 months elapse between Master's proposal approval and oral defense, the Graduate School is no longer enforcing it. The Department adopts this same stance; thus, in practice, PBS no longer requires 4 months to elapse between proposal and oral defense.

#### *Final Steps to Completing the Master's Degree*

A document, [Guidelines for Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations](#), is available from the Office of Degree Requirements of the Graduate School. The Office of Degree Requirements will not accept theses that do not comply with [Graduate School Guidelines](#). These guidelines reflect University-wide standards and are not equivalent to field-specific standards, e.g., as stipulated in the APA Publication Manual. The thesis should also include an abstract with a maximum of 350 words.

A master's thesis must be typed in the style explained in the [Guidelines for Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations](#). The thesis must be submitted through the UMass Amherst [Scholar Works website](#). The thesis must be approved and signed by all members of the thesis Committee and the Department Chair. One original copy of the thesis signature page, on acid free, 20 lb. weight, 8 1/2" x 11" paper, with signatures must be submitted to the Office of Degree Requirements.

Provided that all requirements for the M.S. degree have been fulfilled, students must complete a *Master's Degree Departmental Degree Requirements Form*, available on the PBS intranet. The completed form goes to the Graduate Secretary's office. Candidates must also complete the *Master's Degree Eligibility Form*, available at the Graduate school website. The Degree Eligibility Form, and the signature page, will be signed when the Departmental Degree requirements form is complete.

### *Submission Deadlines*

The University confers degrees three times a year: February, May, and September. Submission guidelines are published in the Graduate School's [Academic Calendar](#). **Deadlines are absolute.**

For current information on deadlines and requirements, please see the Graduate Schools Webpage on [Master's Degree Requirements and Thesis Information](#).

\*\* NOTE: Just about everything that you do requires a memo from the PBS Graduate Office to the Graduate School. If you have questions check with the Graduate Secretary.

## **DEPARTMENTAL CORE COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

The core course program consists of two requirements: (a) **two courses in quantitative methods**, and (b) **two additional courses** outside of Division course requirements.

### *Quantitative Courses*

All first-year graduate students are required to enroll in Psychology 640 (Statistical Inference in Psychology I) and Psychology 641 (Statistical Inference in Psychology II). Students must pass both courses with a grade of B- or higher.

### *Additional Courses*

Students are required to complete two additional courses outside of their Division course requirements. Each course needs to be at least 3 credits. To be selected in consultation with your advisor (and other relevant mentors), these courses can be any within or outside of your Division or the Department that meet your training needs. The goal of these courses is to maximize flexibility in personalized training. Some students may choose to foster breadth (either within their Division or even further outside of their area of study), while others might choose greater specialization.

In selecting these courses, there is the possibility that students and their advisors/mentors may disagree on what makes the most sense for a student's career aspirations. As noted previously, "Petitions concerning exceptions to rules are heard and voted on by the Committee, as are non-termination grievance cases that have failed to be resolved via informal mediation."

### *Waivers of Core Courses*

Waivers of core courses may be granted on the basis of a passing grade (B- or higher) in comparable graduate courses (in both content and number of credits) completed in the context of a graduate program at another institution. Waivers are not granted for prior undergraduate work.

Prior to requesting a course waiver, faculty members who teach a core course at UMass (i.e., quantitative methods or additional courses) should be consulted to determine the equivalence of the previously completed course to the closest course taught at UMass. If the instructor is unavailable or unable to judge equivalence for certain core courses, students should contact the relevant Program Head for a recommendation concerning another appropriate UMass faculty member who can reasonably make this determination. Based on the instructor's evaluation of the prior course, the program faculty should determine whether to put the waiver request forward to the GPD and GSC.

To formally request a course waiver, the student's Program Head should submit a memo to the GPD, which documents the program's support for the waiver and appends (a) the relevant syllabus for the prior graduate course that is the basis of the waiver request, and (b) a statement (memo or email) from the UMass faculty member who can attest to the equivalence of the prior course to the closest course taught at UMass.

### *Prerequisites to Core Course Program*

Ordinarily graduate students are accepted into the program only if they have acquired extensive and fundamental background knowledge in psychology. Students who lack such background in psychology may be required to make up deficiencies in their undergraduate records. The advisor, after examining the undergraduate record of the advisee, shall determine whether a student's undergraduate record is satisfactory in this respect. The advisor should also examine the sufficiency of the student's background for satisfactory progress in the first-year statistics sequence (Psychology 640/641). If a student's record is weak in any of these respects, remedial work may be required to bring his/her background up to the level necessary for satisfactory progress in the graduate core program. Past experience suggests that remedial work may especially be advisable for some students in preparation for the statistics sequence. Advisors are encouraged to consult the same faculty who provide waivers for the core area courses and for the statistics sequence to provide guidance concerning the adequacy of the student's undergraduate records.

### *Completion of Core Course Requirements*

It is recommended that students complete their core course requirements by the end of the second year in the program. Because of special program needs, some students may require longer. But all core course requirements must be completed before the Ph.D. dissertation can be officially started (i.e., before the dissertation proposal is approved and sent to the Graduate School).

## **PRELIMINARY COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS**

The preliminary comprehensive examination (aka "comps") serves both an educational and

evaluative role. Its objective is to develop and demonstrate a level of scholarship and knowledge in the student's chosen area of study that is appropriate to the doctoral level scientist-professional. It is intended to demonstrate a student's integrative and theoretical abilities in a general area of Psychology, as well as a specialized field within that area. The preliminary comprehensive exam has a different function than the master's thesis or doctoral dissertation in which the objective is the demonstration of research competence. It also differs from teaching and clinical practice in which the objective is the demonstration of competence in teaching or clinical work. The objectives of the comps and the criteria for determining that the candidate has met those objectives should be well defined. The comps committee may form the nucleus of the dissertation committee in many cases, but should not routinely be considered so.

Comps will consist of a demonstration of competence in a student's area of specialization and a demonstration of competence in a broader domain of psychology relevant to a student's program of study. The demonstration of specialized competence could take the form of an extended written examination or the form of a critical paper examining research issues within the area of specialization. The demonstration of competence in a broader domain of psychology could again take the form of an extended written examination, or preparation of an extensive paper. Opportunity for an oral defense connected to the examination will be optional.

Because Departmental policy holds Divisional and area faculty primarily responsible for any evaluation of a candidate's performance, and because divisions are typically groups of people having similar interests, there will be a tendency for the form of the comps in any one Division to be similar. Because the intent of this policy, however, is to allow for individual professional development and demonstration of scholarly competence, the imposition of a single examination for all the candidates in a given Division would not be consistent with the intent of this policy. If there is overlap in the projected scope of the preliminary comprehensive examination for a number of candidates studying in a Division or area, some questions common to all candidates may be included.

### *Procedures*

Comps cannot be *officially* started until the Master's thesis has been completed. Successfully completing comps and the two courses in quantitative methods are required before the Ph.D. dissertation can be officially started; that is, advancement to candidacy. Students should complete all required courses by the end of the second semester of the third year of graduate work. The candidate and his/her advisor/Division then discuss and agree on the general area, subject matter, material, deadlines, etc., to be covered by the comprehensive exam. The nature of the comps evaluation committee is determined by the student's Division, but the evaluating faculty must be members of the Graduate Faculty and PBS Department.

When working toward completion of comps, students have the *option* to register for independent study credits (796B Comps). However, this is a vestige of when such registration was required for the comps milestone to appear on a student's transcript. As this is no longer the

case, students do not need to register for comps credit. It is superfluous. When comps are completed and approved by the faculty serving on a student's committee, the chairperson of the committee sends a memo to the GPD indicating that this requirement has been satisfactorily met. If the GPD approves, he or she will route a signed version of the memo to the Graduate School. This memo is what triggers the milestone to appear on the transcript.

If copies of the comprehensive exam are needed for distribution to committee members, it is the student's responsibility to provide them.

## **REQUIREMENTS FOR THE Ph.D. DEGREE**

In addition to the Master's thesis or its equivalent, each student must meet the following specific academic requirements in order to obtain the Ph.D.:

1. Fulfillment of the Departmental core course requirements;
2. Fulfillment of any Divisional requirements;
3. Fulfillment of any individual requirements negotiated with a student's advisor and area;
4. Fulfillment of the Graduate School's residence requirement of a minimum of one academic year as a full-time graduate student in University residence.

The student's advisor, together with the faculty of his/her Division, will determine how many graduate course credits in psychology or related disciplines that the student should earn, beyond those specified for the Master's degree. According to the Graduate School's rules, at least 10 dissertation credits (Psychology 899) must be earned, and the Ph.D. degree cannot be awarded unless a student's cumulative grade point average is 3.0 or higher.

### *Language and Other Technical Requirements*

There is no University- or Department-wide foreign language requirement for either the Master's or Ph.D. degree. However, the Department may require that a student be examined in a foreign language, if competence in a foreign language is necessary for the student's program of study and research. Similarly, the satisfactory completion of a basic course in computer science, or some other technical course, may be required for the Ph.D. degree. Such a course is usually completed early in the student's program of study so that it provides a research tool.

### *Seminars*

All advanced students are expected to participate in graduate seminars. Ordinarily students are expected to take at least three seminars for credit. Usually such seminars are taken in the student's specialty area and are three credits each. Often students participate in the selection of the topic to be investigated by the seminar and lead discussions before the group.

### *Transfer Students*

In addition to fulfilling the University requirements for the Ph.D., transfer students must take three substantive courses or seminars in Psychology (excluding independent study, internships, practica, comprehensive exam, and thesis and dissertation credits).

### *Teaching Experience*

To obtain the Ph.D. degree, all students are required to obtain one semester of teaching experience. Generally, this experience is acquired through serving as a TAs for a course taught by a faculty member within the Department. The GSC has determined that the teaching requirement can be fulfilled through participation in a (paid) TA consisting of at least 10 hours per week for a full year, or 20 hours per week for one semester. This assistantship must include substantive teaching duties. As an alternative, the teaching requirement can be fulfilled by actually teaching a one-semester, three- credit course or by teaching a course through Continuing Education.

### Ph.D. Dissertation

The doctoral dissertation is the last research project undertaken during a student's graduate career. It is the major research undertaking of a student's program and is expected to involve most of a year's investment of time and energy. The format of a student's dissertation is a discretionary matter involving the mutual agreement of a student and his or her Dissertation Committee. Those individuals involved, as they deem it to be appropriate in each case, decide the specific research. However, the dissertation should constitute a significant and original contribution to the field of psychology.

### *Dissertation Committee*

Each student carries out a Ph.D. dissertation under the direction of a Dissertation Committee. Departmental requirements for the composition of the Ph.D. Dissertation Committee are as follows:

The Doctoral Dissertation Committee consists of four or more members of the Graduate Faculty. The chairperson of the Committee is usually from the student's own area within the Department and is typically the student's academic advisor. However, with approval of a student's Division Head, the Chair, as well as other Committee members, can be chosen from outside the area.

Once the Chair has been agreed upon, the student and that faculty member should constitute the remainder of the Committee according to the guidelines that follow. The faculty member then submits a request to the GPD to appoint the Committee, naming him/herself as Chair. If the GPD approves the Committee membership, he or she will submit a formal nomination to the Dean of the Graduate School, who has the ultimate authority in the appointment of dissertation Committees. It is understood that faculty members nominated for appointment to a

Dissertation Committee have already agreed to serve in that capacity.

At least one member must be chosen from faculty in Divisions other than that of the student. As in the case of the Master's Thesis, the member from outside the student's own Division should provide a breadth of perspective in analyzing and assessing the student's work. This member also acts as a representative of the Departmental Chair to ensure that procedural guidelines are properly followed.

In addition, at least one member of the Committee must be chosen from outside the PBS Department. This member, according to Graduate School regulations, will act as a representative of the Graduate Council. He/she may not be adjunct or cross-appointed to PBS unless his/her doctorate is outside Psychology, as the Graduate School specifies that its representative be outside of the student's discipline. As with the Master's thesis, Emeritus faculty can serve on dissertation committees; however, the retired faculty member would need to write a memo to the Graduate School Dean's Office stating that he or she is planning to serve as a committee member, and that he or she will be at all meetings and participating fully.

All members of the Dissertation Committee, including those outside of the student's Division and outside of the PBS Department, will attend all meetings of the Committee. They will be present at the final examination and will be full voting members. (Note that virtual presence is allowable through mechanisms like Skype or Zoom, provided that the Committee member's involvement is synchronous and full.) Should any Committee member not approve the dissertation, the dissertation will be reviewed by the Committee of Division Heads, which will make a written recommendation to the Departmental Chair. The Committee of Division Heads will obtain statements from the doctoral candidate, the Chair of the Doctoral Committee, and the dissenting Committee member(s), and may seek other information that it deems appropriate. After considering the recommendation from the Committee of Division Heads, the Departmental Chair will decide whether or not to sign the dissertation, thereby recommending its acceptance or non-acceptance to the Graduate School.

Any exceptions to these regulations are handled by written request of the GPD. This includes the nomination of non-UMass faculty members to serve on dissertation committees. Although the Graduate School does not encourage this practice, an exception may be granted if clearly justified (e.g., the requisite expertise is not available on campus). It should also be noted that Five-College faculty may serve on dissertation committees as non-voting consultants, again with the approval of the Graduate School.

### *Dissertation Proposal*

Most of the procedures for the Master's proposal (see above) hold true for the dissertation proposal.

Students should start their proposals at the beginning of the second semester of the third year,

with the goal of completing the proposal by the end of the third year. The proposal should describe in detail the work to be done for the dissertation. Traditionally the dissertation proposal consists of a review of the literature relevant to the research problem and a statement of the methodology proposed for the project, as well as a report of any preliminary work that has already been conducted. Once prepared, the proposal is discussed at a meeting attended by the student and the entire Dissertation Committee. After the student has met with his or her Committee to discuss the proposal and the proposal has been approved, the Committee Chair should submit a memo to the GPD stating such. This memo will become part of the student's Departmental graduate file.

Note that the Graduate School Policy states: "After passing the Preliminary Comprehensive Examination, the graduate degree candidate must prepare a dissertation prospectus/outline describing the research to be conducted, analyzed, and presented in the dissertation. The cover sheet must be signed by each member of the Dissertation Committee to indicate approval of the topic and its plan of execution. The Graduate Program Director or Department Head/Chair signs and forwards the prospectus to the Graduate Student Service Center. This copy must be received at least seven (7) months prior to the Final Oral Examination." *However*, in practice, only the cover sheet (i.e., title page with committee member/Department Chair signatures), not the full outline/prospectus, needs to be submitted to the Graduate School. Also, the 7-month rule is not enforced by the Graduate School; it is assumed that the Department has waived this requirement if the student defends earlier than 7 months after the proposal.

### *Dissertation Research*

The amount of Departmental (PBS) money available to support dissertation research is generally about \$500 per student. The procedure for applying for this money is the same as that described for the Master's thesis. Note that NSB students can also request these PBS dissertation funds *if their primary advisor is a PBS faculty member*.

Students are required to take dissertation credits (Psychology 899) while working on the dissertation. At least 10 dissertation credits, but not more than 27, must be earned. There is no total credit hour requirement for the Ph.D. degree imposed by the Graduate School other than the dissertation credits.

### Final Oral Examination

The orals constitute the traditional "defense of the dissertation" examination. As its name implies, this examination is usually completely oral; however, at the discretion of the Department, written parts are not precluded. The exam pertains primarily to the dissertation, although it is not necessarily limited to the dissertation. The examination is conducted by the Dissertation Committee, all members of which must be present, including the outside member. To pass, a student must receive the unanimous vote of the Dissertation Committee; other Graduate Faculty members present may not vote. The oral examination is public, and faculty

and graduate students are encouraged to attend. All committee members and the Department Chair must sign the dissertation as “approved” (these “wet” signatures should be placed on the signature page that meets the Graduate School formatting and page specifications, as discussed further below). Also, the Committee Chair submits a memo to the GPD indicating that the approved committee passed the oral exam on the specific date. If there are no issues, the GPD approves and signs the memo and sends it to the Graduate School for final approval and archiving.

### Scheduling of Ph.D. Orals

When all members of the Dissertation Committee have tentatively approved the final or penultimate draft of the dissertation, the oral defense of the dissertation examination is held. A memo stating the date of the examination, which has been agreed upon by the student and all members of the Dissertation Committee, is sent to the Graduate School. This memo must reach the Graduate School four weeks in advance of the orals so that the details of the examination can be announced to the campus community.

Orals should not be scheduled during summer months, unless absolutely necessary. The relevant Department policy is as follows: In planning their research schedules, students should not expect faculty to provide intensive research supervision or to schedule their orals during the summer months. It is expected that thesis, comps, and dissertation meetings will be held during the academic year and that students will plan accordingly. Exceptions to this pattern are at the discretion of the particular faculty involved, and must be negotiated well in advance. Because Graduate School deadlines are at the end of August, the Department will consider the deadline for dissertation orals to be the end of the spring semester preceding the SOL. Orals will be scheduled beyond this time only with the permission of the dissertation chair and committee members.

As noted previously, although the Graduate School still officially requires that 7 months elapse between Dissertation proposal approval and oral defense, the Graduate School is no longer enforcing it. The Department adopts this same stance; thus, in practice, PBS no longer requires 7 months to elapse between proposal and oral defense.

### Final Steps to Completing the Ph.D.

The guidelines for the dissertation are similar to, but somewhat more stringent than, the guidelines for the Master’s thesis. To aid you in the process, please visit the Graduate School’s [Checklist for Doctoral Degrees webpage](#).

After the dissertation is completed and approved by the Dissertation Committee, and the final orals have been passed, the following steps remain:

1. As noted above, a memo from the student’s Dissertation Committee Chair stating the Ph.D. oral examination was passed must be sent to the GPD. The department will notify

the Graduate School of the results.

2. The student obtains signatures of the Committee Chair/Members and the Department Chair on their dissertation cover/signature page and submits this signed page to Department's Graduate Administrative Assistant and the Graduate School.
3. The student needs to complete a *Departmental Requirements Completion Form for the Ph.D. Degree*. This form can be found on the commonly used forms page of the PBS [Intranet Site](#), and must be signed by the student's advisor or Program head, the Department's Graduate Administrative Assistant, and the staff person who handles keys.
4. The student completes a *Doctoral Degree Eligibility Form*, which can be found on the Graduate School's [Checklist for Doctoral Degrees webpage](#), and presents it along with the completed *Departmental Requirements Completion Form* to the GPD and the Department Chair for their signatures.
5. The dissertation must be typed in a prescribed style (see the guidelines heres) and electronically filed with [ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst](mailto:ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst) – for further details about this process, please see the [Degree Requirements](#) section of the Handbook on the Graduate School website. The Graduate School is the final and only arbiter of what is an acceptable dissertation. Note that the onetime fee (the Graduate School Service Fee) that was charged to all entering graduate students covers expenses associated with Thesis and Dissertation processing, Graduate Commencement, and transcripts.

NOTE: You must be an “active” graduate student to obtain your degree. This means taking credits or paying the Program Fee every semester before you graduate. No fee is needed to maintain active status over the summer.

You are now a Ph.D. – congratulations!!