

**GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK**

**M.A. PROGRAM IN PSYCHOLOGY**

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**PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT  
SOUTHERN CONNECTICUT  
STATE UNIVERSITY**

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## THE PSYCHOLOGY M.A. PROGRAM

The Psychology M.A. program is designed to be a rigorous, research-based Liberal Arts program that develops creative problem-solving skills which will be applicable in clinical, industrial, and educational settings. Flexible enough to be completed either on a full-time or part-time basis, it is appropriate for a wide range of candidates. For those potential doctoral candidates who are not able to enter a Ph.D. or Psy.D. program at the present time, this program can serve as a foundation for later acceptance to such programs. For those already working in clinical, educational, or industrial settings, the program offers an opportunity to update and strengthen credentials. For those whose background in psychology is limited, the program is designed to allow them to explore their personal interests in obtaining employment in settings related to psychology. Teachers in elementary schools can learn how to measure student progress and strengthen understanding of human development; those in secondary schools may use the program to prepare themselves to teach psychology in addition to their current certification. Emphasis is placed on faculty advisement to help in tailoring the program to the needs of the individual student.

As a general program, the curriculum is designed to cover the breadth of psychology, while allowing students to select those areas in which they desire to deepen their knowledge of psychology. By doing so, it is able to meet the educational goals of a variety of students. It must be noted that the program ***IS NOT*** designed to lead to licensure by the State of Connecticut as a therapist. This certification is offered by other programs, and students with concerns are encouraged to contact the Psychology Graduate Coordinator.

## APPLICATION PROCEDURE

To apply to the program, students must submit the following (see School of Graduate and Professional Studies website for links and addresses for submissions):

- The graduate school application.
- All college transcripts.
- Two letters of recommendation from academic or professional references sent to the School of Graduate and Professional Studies. A recommendation form can be downloaded from the program webpage.
- A 300-500 word statement explaining why the applicant is interested in obtaining a Master's degree in psychology, and what type of career the applicant is seeking.

## BECOMING A MATRICULATED STUDENT

Once your application is complete, it is reviewed by the Psychology Department and a recommendation is made to the School of Graduate and Professional Studies. If accepted, you will receive a letter from the Graduate Studies Office stating that you meet the requirements for entrance into the Master's program. This notification will also notify you of the need to submit the required deposit and any remaining paperwork to become a matriculated student. You should also contact the Psychology Graduate Coordinator for advisement. It is suggested that the Planned Program form be used as a guide. This form lists all the courses you will take to complete the program. You should list

the 30 credits of graduate courses you plan to take (plus any additional course requirements, if your acceptance was conditional on your taking some prerequisite courses). Naturally, you must take the required courses (as listed below in the section on **Program Requirements**), but your choice of electives can be tailored to your background, interests, and career objectives. In completing the Planned Program form, you should check the list of courses that the department plans to offer in the next several semesters. A Course Rotation plan is available to assist with this. **Note that some courses are offered every semester, most are offered only every two, three, or four semesters, so you should make sure that each course you want will be offered in the semester you plan to take it.** It is also possible to take one or two courses outside the Psychology Department if they are relevant to your degree program, but these courses must be approved in advance by the Psychology Graduate Coordinator.

The Planned Program is a tool for program planning. It does not have to be signed or approved.

Please note that you do not become a matriculated graduate student at SCSU until the deposit has been received by the Graduate Studies Office.

## **PSYCHOLOGY FACULTY AND RESEARCH INTERESTS**

The educational background and research interests of full-time faculty in the Psychology Department can be found on the Psychology Department website. As a graduate student in our department, you should feel free to seek the advice of any of our faculty about career opportunities or specific topics in psychology in which you have a special interest. The research interests on the list may help you to select a suitable thesis advisor to approach to discuss the thesis project.

## **REGISTERING FOR COURSES**

Graduate students who have been formally admitted to the university by the Dean of the School of Graduate and Professional Studies are considered matriculated and eligible to register on a full-time (9-15 credits) or part-time basis (fewer than 9 credits). Students who register for 9 or more credits are charged the full-time graduate rate. Students who register for fewer than 9 credits are charged the part-time rate. Students are responsible for any tuition or fee increases that occur before the first day of classes. Tuition and fees are charged based on student type or student level (graduate/undergraduate) not course level.

Registration is done online through BannerWeb. Contact the Psychology Graduate Coordinator if the courses you select require departmental permission.

## PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

Students can complete the 30-credit program by choosing either the thesis or the comprehensive exam option.

### GENERAL REQUIREMENTS:

ALL students must meet the following requirements in order to earn the Master's degree:

- An overall graduate grade-point average of 3.0 or better.
- **Required:** PSY 500: Design and Analysis in Psychology (3 credits)
- **Psychology Elective Group 1:** Completion of at least one of the following (3 credits):
  - PSY 501: Thinking and Learning
  - PSY 503: Cognition and Memory
  - PSY 504: Topics in Perception
  - PSY 505: Contemporary Theories of Motivation
  - PSY 583: Seminar in Comparative Physiological Psychology
- **Psychology Elective Group 2:** Completion of at least one of the following (3 Credits):
  - PSY 502: Problems in Psychology
  - PSY 512: Theories and Issues in Developmental Psychology
  - PSY 517: Seminar in Social Psychology
  - PSY 526: Theories and Research in Personality

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE THESIS OPTION:

- **Three Thesis Courses:**
  - PSY 589: Thesis Seminar (3 Credits)
  - PSY 590: Thesis Proposal (3 Credits, Required)
  - PSY 591: Thesis (3 Credits, Required)
- **Elective Courses:** Four more graduate courses (12 credits). These can include additional courses from Group 1 and 2 above, additional PSY graduate courses, and up to two graduate courses from other departments.

If a student decides to not pursue a thesis, PSY 589 may be applied to the Comprehensive Exam track. Those electing the thesis must also present:

- Present and submit the thesis proposal to their thesis committee (advisor, assigned member of the Graduate Committee, and one additional reader decided by the advisor and student)
- Submit the final version of the thesis to their thesis committee and to the School of Graduate and Professional Studies.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE EXAM OPTION:**

In addition to the General Requirements listed above, students selecting this option must complete:

- **Elective Courses:** Seven more graduate courses (21 credits). These can include additional courses from Group 1 and 2 above, additional PSY graduate courses, and up to two graduate courses from other departments.
- The comprehensive exam:
  - Submit an application to the Psychology Graduate Coordinator selecting sections for the Exam
  - Pass the Comprehensive Exam.

## **TWO TYPICAL PLANNED PROGRAMS**

To help you design your program of courses, two typical planned programs are given below as examples, one for the thesis option and one for the comprehensive exam option. Under both options, the required course (PSY 500) is completed in the first Fall semester after matriculation. Both examples also present the minimum number of courses required. Students may take additional courses if desired.

Note that the normal full-time course load for graduate students is three courses a semester, although taking four courses per semester is possible in some cases. However, many of our students do not have the time to devote to three courses per semester, and it is perfectly acceptable to complete the program on a part-time basis, taking one or two courses a semester. Note however, that the university has a six-year time limit for completing a Master's degree program.

### **Thesis Option Planned Program Example:**

#### Fall Semester, First Year

PSY 500 Design and Analysis  
 PSY 5xx (Group 1 or Group 2)  
 PSY 5xx (Elective)

#### Spring Semester, First Year

PSY 5xx (Group 1 or Group 2)  
 PSY 5xx (Elective)  
 PSY 589 Thesis Seminar

#### Fall Semester, Second Year

PSY 590 Thesis Proposal  
 PSY 5xx (Elective)

#### Spring Semester, Second Year

PSY 591 Thesis  
 PSY 5xx (Elective)

Under the thesis option, students normally complete the required courses and distribution requirements in their first year, and complete the thesis courses (PSY 590 and PSY 591) in their last two semesters.

### **Comprehensive Exam Option Planned Program Example:**

Students are advised to take at least five courses that can be used to prepare for the comprehensive exam (see section on **The Comprehensive Exam Option**). The exam is normally taken at the end of the student's last semester. The exam is focused on material from PSY 500 Design and Analysis and two other courses chosen by the student from a subset of regular psychology graduate offerings.

#### Fall Semester, First Year

PSY 500 Design and Analysis

PSY 5xx (Group 1 or Group 2)

PSY 5xx (Elective)

#### Spring Semester, First Year

PSY 5xx (Group 1 or Group 2)

PSY 5xx (Elective)

PSY 5xx (Elective)

#### Fall Semester, Second Year

PSY 5xx (Elective)

PSY 5xx (Elective)

#### Spring Semester, Second Year

PSY 5xx (Elective)

PSY 5xx (Elective)

(Comprehensive Exam taken in November)

### **ONE-YEAR OPTION**

The program may be completed in two semesters and a summer session if desired. Students wishing this option should consult with the Graduate Coordinator at the time of matriculation. This plan entails four courses each in the fall and spring semesters, and two courses over the summer. Therefore, students electing this option must ensure that their work schedules allow sufficient time to be devoted to their studies to ensure success. Students electing this plan can take the comprehensive exam at the end of their second full semester (spring or fall).

### **ACCELERATED PATHWAY**

The M.A. in Psychology – Accelerated Pathway provides high-achieving SCSUI undergraduate students with an opportunity to finish their graduate degree in one year, following the successful completion of a B.A. in Psychology (Concentration: B.A. to M.A. Accelerated Pathway) or B.S. in Psychology (Concentration: B.S. to M.A. Accelerated Pathway) at Southern Connecticut State University.

This program is designed for SCSU Psychology students who wish to extend their research training and to develop creative problem-solving skills. The program is designed to lead to the completion of a Master's thesis, but can also be completed through a comprehensive exam.

#### **Senior year of undergraduate study:**

PSY 500: Design and Analysis in Psychology (3 credits)

PSY 589: Thesis Seminar (3 credits)

Apply to MA Program

Year after acceptance to the MA Program

**Group 1:** Completion of at least one of the following courses: (3 credits)

PSY 501: Thinking and Learning

PSY 503: Cognition and Memory

PSY 504: Topics in Perception

PSY 505: Contemporary Theories of Motivation

PSY 583: Seminar in Comparative Physiological Psychology.

**Group 2:** Completion of at least one of the following courses (3 Credits):

PSY 502: Problems in Psychology

PSY 512: Theories and Issues in Developmental Psychology

PSY 517: Seminar in Social Psychology

PSY 526: Theories and Research in Personality.

### **Graduate Capstone**

**Thesis Track:** students must complete the following:

PSY 590 - Thesis Proposal (3 credits)

PSY 591 – Thesis (3 credits)

**Electives:** 12 credits at the graduate level. These can include additional courses from Group 1 and 2 above, additional PSY graduate courses, and up to two graduate courses from other departments.

**Comprehensive Exam Track:** Students must complete the following:

Comprehensive Exam

**Electives:** 18 credits at the graduate level. These can include additional courses from Group 1 and 2 above, additional PSY graduate courses, and up to two graduate courses from other departments.

### **FOLLOWING YOUR PLANNED PROGRAM**

To obtain your Master's degree, you must take 30 credits as described above and complete your chosen capstone (thesis or comprehensive exam).

Students' plans can change considerably from when they first enter graduate school, and you may want to substitute one course for another in your schedule. This is fine, **provided that you still meet all the departmental requirements.** Note also that if you switch from the thesis option to the comprehensive exam, or vice versa, this constitutes a change in two courses listed on your planned program, which should be taken into consideration.

### **THE COMPREHENSIVE EXAM CAPSTONE OPTION**

A student is required to complete 30 credits in course work with a minimum of a "B" average and must pass the comprehensive exam to fulfill the requirements for a M.A. in Psychology. Students may elect to take the comprehensive exam before they finish the 30 required credits of course work. The Master's degree will not be awarded until all requirements are completed.

The comprehensive exam is designed to test your knowledge in a variety of different areas of psychology. **Three areas are required for all students.** You must take the Design and Analysis section, plus two of the ten other sections listed below. The right column lists the graduate course that provides the best preparation for each section of the exam. In addition, you should plan to devote a significant amount of time in your final semester toward preparing for the comprehensive exam.

<b>Exam Section</b>	<b>Course(s)</b>
REQUIRED SECTION:	
Design and Analysis	PSY 500 Design and Analysis
SELECT TWO SECTIONS:	
Cognition	PSY 503 Cognition and Memory
Developmental	PSY 512 Theories & Issues in Developmental Psychology
History and Systems	PSY 502 Problems in Psychology
Law and Ethics	PSY 592 Issues in Psychology, Law, and Ethics
Learning	PSY 501 Thinking and Learning
Perception	PSY 504 Topics in Perception
Personality	PSY 526 Theories and Research in Personality
Psychopathology	PSY 528 Psychopathology
Physiological	PSY 583 Seminar in Comparative Physiological Psych.
Social	PSY 517 Social Psychology

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Students **cannot** change from the Comprehensive Exam to the Thesis option after taking the comprehensive exam. The exam is offered twice a year, around the last week of April and the last week of November. If it should happen that a student does not pass the comprehensive exam on his/her first attempt, the student may be permitted to take the exam one more time, but not until the next scheduled administration, or at a later time.

To sign up for the comprehensive exam, you should obtain a form at the beginning of the exam semester from the Psychology Graduate Coordinator, which states your intention to take the exam that semester and lists the sections you want to take. This form should be submitted to the Psychology Graduate Coordinator by the date listed on the form.

## **THE THESIS OPTION**

To prepare for the thesis, students are strongly encouraged to enroll in PSY 589, which guides the student along the thesis path, including developing working ideas and locating thesis advisors. In PSY 590, the student works directly with their thesis advisor to write the proposal, which must then be approved by their thesis committee. In PSY 591, the student conducts the thesis research and completes writing the thesis, which must be approved by the thesis advisor, a second reader (a member of the Psychology Graduate Committee) and the Dean of Graduate and Professional Studies.

## Preparing for the Thesis Project

If you intend to write a Master's thesis, you should start planning early. PSY 500 presents an excellent opportunity to begin developing ideas and research the literature in an area of interest. During PSY 589 you should start to think about (1) possible topics you would like to investigate and (2) possible faculty members in the department who could serve as your advisor. The group experience of PSY 589 will facilitate this process. Once you have at least a general idea of a topic area you want to pursue, you should speak to one or more faculty members to find one who will serve as your thesis advisor. Your thesis advisor must be a full-time faculty member in the Psychology Department, even if you are planning to conduct a research project under the direction of someone who works in a laboratory or other facility outside the university. If you are uncertain about who would be an appropriate advisor for your thesis, consult with the Psychology Graduate Coordinator.

**You must have obtained a thesis advisor before you can receive the permission to sign up for PSY 590.** Before agreeing to serve as your thesis advisor, the faculty member should be reasonably confident that your project has scientific merit and that you will be able to obtain the resources necessary to complete the research (appropriate research participants, equipment, supplies, etc.). You will be wasting your time and money if you register for PSY 590 but do not have a realistic plan for your thesis project.

**Writing the Thesis Proposal (PSY 590):** During this semester, you should meet regularly with your thesis advisor to plan your research project and to write the thesis proposal. Thesis proposals should follow APA style for manuscripts. To complete the thesis proposal, you will need to complete the following steps:

1. Conduct a review of the literature on your topic.
2. Design your research project.
3. Review information about completing a thesis on the School of Graduate and Professional Studies website. Write a draft of the thesis proposal, and revise it based on your advisor's suggestions and advice. The citations and references in the thesis proposal must be written according to APA style.
4. Once your advisor believes the thesis proposal is in good shape, submit the thesis to the Psychology Graduate Coordinator, for distribution to the members of the Thesis Committee. A second reader for your thesis will be assigned at this time. Two weeks should be allowed for the Thesis Committee to schedule a meeting and review a thesis proposal before a meeting.
5. A thesis proposal meeting will be scheduled, in which you and your advisor will meet with the Thesis Committee. At this meeting, you should present a brief overview of your proposed project, and the Committee members will give you feedback and make suggestions. If the proposal is given tentative approval, you will then need to revise the thesis proposal, based on the written and oral suggestions provided by the Thesis Committee.

6. If your thesis will involve human participants or animal subjects, your project must be approved by the appropriate university committee **before you can start the research**. Obtain the necessary forms online, fill them out according to the instructions, and submit them to the appropriate committee.

7. You will revise the proposal based on the feedback of the Thesis Committee, and obtain the approval of the revised proposal from your thesis advisor and the second reader. An electronic signature page is then submitted to the Psychology Graduate Coordinator.

As you can see, completing a thesis proposal requires many steps, which is why an entire semester (and three course credits) are devoted to the proposal. To make sure you can complete the proposal on time, you should start promptly at the beginning of the semester and allocate a block of time each week to work on the proposal (just as you would for any other course). Writing the thesis proposal is a good deal of work, but once it is done you are well on your way to completing a successful Master's thesis.

**Conducting the Thesis Project (PSY 591):** During this semester, you should complete the following steps:

1. Conduct your research project, as you outlined in your thesis proposal. (**IMPORTANT: Remember that you cannot start to work with human or animal subjects until you have received approval from the human subjects committee or the animal care committee.**)
2. Analyze your data and write the thesis. See the School of Graduate and Professional Studies website for guidelines and forms. These should be prepared using APA style.
3. Have your thesis advisor and second reader read your thesis, then revise it according to their feedback.
4. Once both your thesis advisor and second reader agree that the thesis is acceptable, obtain their electronic signatures, and the electronic signature of the Psychology Department Chair, on the signature page (See the School of Graduate and Professional Studies website).
5. Submit the thesis electronically to the School of Graduate and Professional Studies using the instructions found on their website.
6. To obtain your degree at the end of the semester, **the completed thesis must be electronically submitted to the School of Graduate and Professional Studies by the date listed on their website**. A few weeks after you submit the thesis, you will receive a letter from the Graduate Dean stating whether the thesis has been approved.

## **GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS**

Each year, the department awards a limited number of Graduate Assistantships to Psychology M.A. students. The positions are half-time (20 hours/week) appointments. Graduate Assistants are normally scheduled to work between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., but other arrangements can be made in some cases. Occasional Saturday hours may be required. The main duties of Graduate Assistants are tutoring undergraduate students, assisting faculty members in research and teaching, and performing a variety of other functions for the department, such as setting up bulletin boards and helping out in departmental gatherings and activities. The Graduate Assistants are paid a stipend each semester. They still must pay tuition, but university fees are waived. The Graduate Assistantships provide an excellent opportunity to gain experience in teaching and research, and they are especially useful for students who plan to apply to doctoral programs in the future.

If you are interested in applying for an assistantship, you should contact the Psychology Graduate Coordinator for further details.

## **FUNDS FOR RESEARCH AND CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE**

GSAC Funds. The SCSU Graduate Student Affairs Committee (GSAC) has limited funds available for graduate students who attend conferences in their fields, or who incur expenses while conducting research for their courses or theses. In either case, these awards will probably not cover all of your expenses, but they can help to defray some of your costs, and we encourage you to make use of this resource. Research funding application deadlines can be found on the GSAC webpage. For further information, consult the GSAC webpage.

The Barbara McEwen Memorial Scholarship. This scholarship is available to students who are planning research. It is dedicated to the memory and legacy of the late Dr. Barbara McEwen, Professor Emeritus in the Psychology Department at Southern Connecticut State University. Dr. McEwen received her B.A. from Hunter College, an M.A. from the University of Iowa, a Ph.D. from McGill University. She retired in 1990, and is fondly remembered by current faculty who had the honor to meet and work with her. The scholarship is funded by an endowment given to Southern following her passing.

The award amount will vary depending upon the availability of funds, but will not likely exceed \$900. The criteria for the scholarship are as follows:

1. The candidate(s) must be a matriculated graduate student enrolled in the M.A. program in Psychology.
2. The candidate(s) must have a cumulative 3.5 G.P.A or better.
3. The candidate(s) must have nine or more credits in the program.
4. Priority consideration will be given to students who are planning or carrying out independent research, either for a thesis or an independent study.

## RESOURCES FOR STUDENT RESEARCH

To help you with course work, graduate theses, or other research projects, the following resources are available for graduate student use. To obtain access to any of these items, ask your thesis advisor or any other faculty member in the department.

1. Access to the University's computer system, which has e-mail and Internet access, a variety of word-processing, data-processing, and statistical packages.
2. A computer lab in Engleman D029 with computers available for the use of psychology students when they are working on course work or thesis research.
3. A supply of various types of equipment used in psychological research with both human or animal subjects. Consult with your thesis advisor for information on what equipment is available to assist you in your research.
4. A variety of psychological test materials for conducting cognitive and personality assessment.
5. Online databases for psychology and related fields, such as PsychInfo, Medline, BIOSIS, and Sociofile.
6. The Psychology area in Engleman Hall has laboratory rooms that are designed for research with adult subjects, with children, or with animals.

## PREPARING FOR GRADUATION: ESSENTIAL STEPS IN YOUR LAST TWO SEMESTERS

Whether you are following the thesis or comprehensive exam option, you need to ensure that in last two semesters of graduate work, you meet with the Psychology Graduate Coordinator and **check your transcript against the graduation requirements.**

## STATEMENT OF STUDENTS' RIGHTS

A student in the Psychology Department at SCSU has a right to expect:

1. A clear statement of the content and format of the course (i.e., texts and subjects to be discussed), an outline of the structure of the course, the attendance policy of the instructor, and a statement about grading in the course. This should be received no later than the end of the first week of the semester. The content of the course should correspond substantially to the University catalog description.
2. A published statement of the instructor's office hours and the presence of the instructor during those times.

3. The instructor to meet his or her courses at their assigned times and to begin and end promptly.
4. That there be a reasonable number of evaluations of students' understanding of the material in the course. There should be at least two, and preferably more, such evaluations. Class participation should be encouraged. Instructors should grade and report results to students promptly for all tests and papers. Papers should be returned with written commentary. Opportunity for review of all evaluation results should be provided. Students have a right to know, in advance, how their work will be evaluated, and they have a right to know their approximate academic standing, or grade, during the course of the semester.
5. The overwhelming majority of the time spent in class be directed to the subject matter of the course.
6. Class discussion should be conducted with fairness and without defaming any individual or group. Personal opinions by the instructor should be identified as such.
7. Students with complaints that the instructor has not met these standards are strongly encouraged first to discuss the matter with the instructor and, failing satisfaction there, bring their complaints to the Psychology Department Chair. If satisfaction cannot be obtained with the Chair, the complaint may be directed to the appropriate academic or graduate deans.