



Department of Psychology
Statement of Policies for the Graduate Program
2023-2024

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ADMISSIONS

APPLICATION DEADLINE AND MATERIALS

The Department of Psychology offers graduate work leading to the Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy degrees. To be considered for the fall semester all material should be on file in the department by **January 15th**. Students will be admitted to graduate study on the basis of their potential for achievement in research, scholarship, and teaching. The most promising applicants will be accepted. Because the number of students that the department can successfully accommodate is limited, it will not always be possible to admit all qualified applicants.

The minimum application consists of the following:

- 1) A completed Graduate School [application](https://apply.nmsu.edu/apply/) (https://apply.nmsu.edu/apply/)
- 2) Three (3) letters of recommendation from professors, employers, or others qualified to evaluate your potential for graduate work (Uploaded through application process).
- 3) A letter explaining your research interests and experience, career goals, and an indication of the faculty members whose work is of particular interest to you (uploaded through the application process). Our program uses an apprenticeship model in that students learn how to conduct original research by collaborating closely with their advisor. Thus, a close match between the research interests of the student and his/her/their advisor is a critical factor in our admission decisions.
- 4) A curriculum vitae or resume.
- 5) A writing sample (e.g., a paper the student wrote for a course, a senior thesis or a master's thesis uploaded through application process). Ideally, the sample should demonstrate the student's ability to write clearly about psychological research.

IMPORTANT NOTES ABOUT THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS

- Students with bachelor's degrees should apply for admittance to the Master's program even if their ultimate goal is a Ph.D. Students who earn their M.A. at New Mexico State University will be considered for admission to the doctoral program after the oral defense of their thesis. Following a recommendation from the student's committee, admission is determined by a vote of the entire faculty.
- Students with a Master's degree in experimental psychology from other institutions or from another department at NMSU may apply for admittance to the Ph.D. program. The NMSU Graduate School requires doctoral students to pass a qualifying exam prior to being formally admitted into a doctoral program. See below for more information about the qualifying exam.

ADMISSIONS CRITERIA

- Only applicants with completed application packets will be reviewed.
- The relative importance of different qualifications relevant to admission is listed below (e.g., low, medium, or high importance)
 - Statement of goals and objectives – high
 - Applicant's interests - high
 - Writing sample – high
 - GPA – high
 - Letters of recommendation – high
 - Research experience – medium
 - Undergraduate psychology preparation – medium
 - Work experience – low
- All students are assigned a faculty advisor when admitted to the program. Students must have a faculty advisor in order to remain in the program.

REVIEW OF PROGRESS TOWARD DEGREE

TIMING

The Psychology Department faculty reviews the progress of each full-time psychology graduate student at the end of each spring semester. The faculty reviews the progress of any students identified by a faculty member who may need more immediate review at the end of the fall semester. The fall review follows-up on any actions or recommendations made in a student's spring evaluation letter. Similarly, the spring review follows-up on any actions or recommendations made after the fall review. The primary data reviewed include:

- 1) The student's research performance,
- 2) The student's performance in classes,
- 3) The student's progress towards their degree,
- 4) The student's performance as a teaching or research assistant, if applicable, and
- 5) The student's attendance at weekly lab meetings, colloquia, and other department activities.

These criteria for success in the graduate program are based on the philosophy that a graduate student's education is based not simply on coursework, but on research, assistantship work, participation in PSYC 590 (Research Seminar), participation in lab meetings, and attendance at departmental colloquia. In other words, maintaining a minimum grade point average does not constitute sufficient performance for a favorable evaluation by the faculty.

EVALUATION LETTERS

Shortly after the spring and fall evaluation meetings, students will receive a letter summarizing their evaluation. Normally, this letter is drafted by the student's advisor and co-signed by the Graduate Director and Department Head. If a student disagrees with the evaluation, the student can request modifications before a final version is placed in the student's file. (Note that the faculty are not required to agree with or accept the student's position and may choose not to modify the feedback to the student.) The evaluation also serves as crucial input in making decisions concerning the level of financial support that the department will extend to the student for the following academic year.

GOALS FOR TIMELY DEGREE COMPLETION

Milestone	Exceptional progress	Satisfactory progress	Unsatisfactory progress (and grounds for possible dismissal from the program)
Approved thesis proposal	2 semesters after entering	3 semesters after entering	4 semesters after entering
M.A.	4 semesters after entering	5 semesters after entering	6 semesters after entering
Comps	2 semesters after M.A./passing qualifying exam	3 semesters after M.A./passing qualifying exam	4 semesters after M.A./passing qualifying exam
Approved Dissertation Proposal	2 semesters after completing Comps	3 semesters after completing Comps	4 semesters after completing Comps

- 1) Semesters refer to fall and spring semesters, only. Summers are not included in the timeline.
- 2) Students who fail to meet the deadlines in the middle column for any milestone will have it noted in their year-end evaluation letter that they are making unsatisfactory progress toward the degree.
- 3) Deadlines may be modified in situations deemed to be truly exceptional by the faculty of the Department of Psychology.

CHANGING ADVISORS

Our program uses an apprenticeship model; students learn how to conduct original research by collaborating closely with their advisor. Thus, a close match between the research interests of the student and their advisor is a critical factor in our admission decisions. Barring extenuating circumstances, students should

expect to work with their assigned advisor throughout their degree progress. Possible extenuating circumstances that may merit changing advisors are:

- 1) A substantial change in the student's research interests
- 2) The addition of a new faculty member to the department whose research interests are a better match for those of the student than his/her current advisor
- 3) Extreme or persistent interpersonal conflicts between the student and his/her current advisor
- 4) The student's current advisor resigns his/her/their status as advisor

ETHICAL GUIDELINES

All graduate students affiliated with the Department of Psychology are expected to behave in accordance with current [APA ethical guidelines](https://www.apa.org/ethics/code) (<https://www.apa.org/ethics/code>). Any substantiated breach of APA ethical guidelines may be grounds for dismissal from the program.

Students are required to follow all NMSU [Institutional Review Board](https://research.nmsu.edu) (<https://research.nmsu.edu>) research compliance guidelines.

ASSISTANTSHIP ASSIGNMENTS

ELIGIBILITY

To be considered for in-state tuition, all graduate students who are U.S. citizens must establish NM state residency. First year students who are employed at least 10 hrs./week will automatically receive the resident tuition rate during the first 12 months. Please note that the graduate school does not grant this waiver for domestic students beyond the 12 months. International students receive the resident tuition rate throughout their degree program as long as they receive at least a 10-hour assistantship.

BASIC INFORMATION

- a) The Graduate Director makes assistantship assignments every semester.
- b) All assistantships funded by the State General fund are teaching assistantships (TAs). The level of work for this funding is usually either 10 or 20 hours per week. Performance in TA assignments is important in determining the likelihood of future financial support.
- c) In addition to the positions based on State General funding, faculty members may have funding from grants and contracts supported by government agencies or by industry. For the most part, the faculty members who have the grants or contracts select research assistants based on their skills and

prior performance. As with State General funding, these positions are usually either 10 or 20 hours per week.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES FOR GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIPS

- a) Assistantships start the week before classes and end when final grades are turned in (usually the Tuesday after finals week). You must be present the week before classes start, and make arrangements with your instructor about the day grades are due.
- b) Note that faculty must maintain grades and papers for years after the class has been taught. Make sure to maintain any spreadsheets or other graded material, just in case.
- c) Contact the instructor to whom you've been assigned at least one week before classes start. Note that each instructor may have different uses for their teaching assistants. For labs, TAs may teach the whole section(s), prepare lectures and grade papers. For courses, some TAs may be asked to grade papers only, while other TAs may be required to attend the classes, proctor exams, and grade papers. Some instructors may even ask their TAs to teach some of their classes when they are sick or away on business. Be aware that the assignment can vary widely among faculty and it is up to you to make sure you perform whatever tasks are requested.
- d) Throughout the semester, contact the instructor at least once a week with status and other information. Unless the faculty member approves your early leave, you are expected to stay on campus through the day that grades are turned in (usually the Tuesday after the last final). You must also inform your supervisor whenever you plan to go out-of-town (when, where, how to contact you). If the faculty member needs your help for those days, you are expected to be there to help them.
- e) Respond promptly (i.e., ideally within 24 hours) to any e-mail or phone contact from the instructor, and if you need to be away and out of touch, make sure the instructor knows your plans well in advance of the absence.
- f) Proctor exams as necessary, arriving to class at least 5-10 minutes early.
- g) Grade exams/papers as quickly as possible. You need to look at the instructor's syllabus and plan your time around grading these exams (or any other activity that the instructor/research faculty requests). Make sure to have a discussion with the instructor at the beginning of the semester to plan ahead and understand grading priorities.
- h) Have reasonable office hours and be available to undergraduates. Interact with undergraduates in a professional manner and respond to their requests promptly.
- i) Be accurate when entering grades into a spreadsheet and keep grade records up-to-date. Ask someone else or a fellow graduate student to check your work if you have any doubts.
- j) Treat students' exams and assignments with respect.

- k) If more than one TA is assigned to an instructor with other graduate TAs to get the job done.
- l) Offer any assistance to the instructor if you see some place where help might be needed.

EVALUATION OF GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTS

Supervisors of graduate teaching assistants will use the department's Teaching Assistant Evaluation Form (available on the [department's website](#)) to communicate the instructor's expectations for his/her/their teaching assistant at the beginning of the term and to document the assistant's performance in those tasks. The instructor and TA should meet early in the term to discuss the instructor's expectations. The instructor and TA should meet at the end of the term to complete the rating portion of the form. Both the TA and the instructor should complete the ratings and discuss any discrepancies in the ratings. The final version of the instructor's ratings will be added to the TA's permanent file and may be discussed by Psychology Department faculty at the annual spring evaluation of graduate students. Should the TA choose to do so, he/she/they may use the evaluations to document teaching effectiveness (e.g., when applying for jobs, awards, or fellowships).

MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

The master's degree is a legitimate terminal goal for many students. Most students who earn a master's degree in the program successfully find employment in a degree-relevant job. The master's degree is in general experimental psychology with possible emphases in engineering psychology, cognitive psychology, and social psychology. The program is designed to provide graduates with the tools and knowledge necessary for further training at the doctoral level or for employment in industry or government.

Students must take a minimum of 36 credit hours with at least 15 credit hours in Psychology and at least 15 credit hours in courses numbered 500 or above. These requirements are verified by the [STAR audit system](https://records.nmsu.edu/star-degree-audit/) (<https://records.nmsu.edu/star-degree-audit/>). We recommend you check your STAR audit at least once/semester to verify that courses appear as they should. If necessary, exceptions to the requirements below can be made on your audit using the [Degree Audit Exception form](#) available from the graduate school. Students are also required to:

1. Complete a first-year project (4-6 credits of PSYC 598 First-Year Project)
2. Complete the core course corresponding to the student's area of study (see below for eligible courses)
3. Complete two additional content courses (see below for eligible courses)
4. Complete the required quantitative methods sequence: PSYC 507, PSYC 508, and PSYC 510
5. Complete a research thesis (6 credits of PSYC 599 Thesis).

These requirements are summarized in the [Revised PSYC MA Map](#), available on the Department website.

No practical experience is required. There is not a non-thesis option.

Completion time: two to three years; a minimum of 36 credit hours.

M.A. ELIGIBLE COURSEWORK

Core Courses: The following three courses will fulfill the core course requirement for both the M.A. and the Ph.D. program

- PSYC 524, Cognitive Psychology
- PSYC 527, Social Psychology
- PSYC 547, Engineering Psychology

Note: For both the M.A. and the Ph.D. programs, once a student fulfills the core requirement for their area, the remaining two core courses can be considered content courses (i.e., students can enroll in either or both of them to fulfill the content course requirement).

All other courses are in one of the following three categories:

Content	Stat	Methods
PSYC 520, Learning Theory & Methodology	PSYC 507	PSYC 510, Computer Methodology
PSYC 522, Sensation & Perception Theory & Methodology	PSYC 508	PSYC 523, Methods in Cognitive Psychology
PSYC 540, History & Systems of Psychology		PSYC 529, Methods in Social Psychology
PSYC 570, Special Topics		PSYC 548, Methods in Engineering Psychology
		PSYC 550, Teaching of Psych

*Grandfather clause: Students enrolled in the M.A. or Ph.D. program prior to Fall 2016 can choose either the previous requirements or these requirements. However, either set of requirements must be chosen as a whole; specific elements of the two sets of requirements may not be mixed.

**PSYC 570, Special Topics may be considered content, stat, or methods depending on the specific content of the course.

FIRST-YEAR PROJECT

1. Overview: During the first year after admission into the Master's program, students will complete a research project under the supervision of their advisor.

In most cases, the instructor for the course (PSYC 598) will be the student's academic advisor. Another faculty member may supervise the research, and in that case, should be listed as the instructor for the course.

2. Project Topic: Advisors are encouraged to steer their first-year students toward first-year project topics that might be publishable. The student's eventual Master's project may be on the same topic as the first-year project but it does not have to be on the same topic.

3. Registration:

Fall Semester: Students must sign up for up to 2 credits in PSY 598 and may use the S/U option. PSY 598 requires an "ADD/DROP" form available in the Psychology Department office and [online](#). Your advisor must sign this form.

Spring Semester: Students must sign up for 2 credits in PSY 598 and must use the letter grade option. At the end of the semester, students will present a summary of their research project to the faculty (in PSYC 590 colloquium).

4. Required Products: A preliminary written literature review and method will be due during the fall semester final exam week. The document will be reviewed by the student's faculty advisor and by one additional Psychology Department faculty member selected by the student and their advisor. The project is subject to the approval of the faculty advisor. The outside reader will largely provide feedback on the student's writing (e.g., whether the document makes sense to someone who may not know the research area). The outside reader may also make comments on the design of the project, but the student and advisor are not required to make any changes. The feedback from the faculty advisor and outside reader may be provided in whatever fashion they prefer (e.g., conversation, email, written on the document).

In the spring, each student will give an approximately 15-minute talk on his/her/their first-year project during the weekly colloquium meeting (i.e., PSYC 590). The student will be given primarily formative feedback on the talk, from his/her/their faculty advisor and from any other faculty members who wish to give feedback.

A complete APA-style manuscript will be due on the last business day in April and should be of a depth and length that is appropriate to submit to a journal. The document will be reviewed by the student's faculty advisor and by one additional Psychology Department faculty member selected by the student and their advisor. Ideally, the outside reader in the spring semester will be different from the fall outside reader. The outside reader will largely provide feedback on the

student's writing but may also provide feedback on other aspects of the project. The feedback from the faculty advisor and outside reader may be provided in whatever fashion they prefer.

5. Evaluation: The student's faculty advisor will submit a final grade for PSYC 598 based on their evaluation of the student's APA-style manuscript and the student's performance throughout the first-year project.

MASTER'S THESIS

1. Overview: The thesis provides master's-level students with the opportunity both to develop their skills as independent researchers and to demonstrate those skills. However, the thesis should not serve as the only means by which students acquire research skill. Rather, the faculty strongly urges graduate students to be involved in research from their first day on campus, and recommend that students view the thesis as a part of an on-going involvement in research, not as a rare event of outsized importance.

2. Advisory Committee: A Master's Thesis in our department is a written description of original research conducted by the student. The student's advisory committee must approve this research before it is conducted. The student, in consultation with his or her advisor, will form an advisory committee. The advisory committee will consist of at least four members -- three faculty members from Psychology and one from an outside department. Generally, two of the three Psychology members will be from within the student's area and the third will be from another area in the department. The committee member from the outside department will serve as the Dean's representative on the committee. In consultation with the committee chair, students should select as their Dean's Rep a faculty member who can offer content-relevant insights. The Dean's representative and the committee chair must have appointments to the graduate faculty. Students who have declared a minor must have at least one representative from the minor area on their committee. The representative of the minor area can also serve as the Dean's representative. If appropriate, the advisory committee may also have a member from off campus (in addition to the required four members described above), as long as that person has earned at least a Master's or equivalent degree. Each graduate student will submit the names of his/her advisory committee members and a justification for selecting each committee member to the department head using the Department of Psychology [Graduate Student Committee Composition Form](#). Subsequent changes in the committee must be submitted and justified in writing and must be agreed to by the advisor as well as the department head.

3. Master's Thesis Proposal Meeting: The student will obtain this approval at a Master's Thesis Proposal Meeting attended by the student, their advisor, and the

student's advisory committee. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the proposed research and to suggest whatever changes in it that is deemed necessary to make it a worthwhile scientific effort. This objective is more easily met if the proposal document is in final M.A. thesis form except for the Results, Discussion, and Conclusions. Students should discuss the proposed research with their advisor and, if necessary, their advisory committee prior to writing the M.A. proposal document. The approval of the committee and any required changes in the project should be documented using the department's [Thesis/Dissertation Proposal Approval Form](#).

4. PSYC 599 Credit Requirements: Six credit hours of PSYC 599 are required for the M.A. degree. Students can take as many credit hours of PSYC 599 as they wish, but only six credits may be counted toward the required 36 credits.

5. Final Examination (Master's Orals)

A. Prerequisites:

- Minimum average GPA of 3.0 in all courses taken for graduate credit at NMSU and/or other institutions.
- Completed all coursework for the M.A. degree.
- Enrolled in the semester in which the final examination is taken and enrolled in at least 3 credits of PSY599.

B. Submit completed [Committee for Final Examination](#) to Graduate School two weeks before the examination is taken. This form specifies your major and minor (if any) areas, the examination date, site, etc., and the faculty who will compose your examination committee.

C. The department encourages students to present orally an early version of their completed thesis research to their committee or to the department prior to writing the final document and defending it.

D. The committee chair, or a majority of committee members, will approve of the thesis document prior to scheduling an oral defense. If timing does not allow for reading of the document prior to scheduling the meeting, a discussion will be held at the beginning of the defense (with the student temporarily dismissed) to decide if the committee wishes to let the student proceed or not.

Notes:

- i. To demonstrate professional-level proficiency, students must receive a grade of "B-" or better in courses taken to satisfy any degree requirements. If the student receives a grade of "C+" or lower, those credits cannot be applied to the degree. If the student receives a grade of "C+" or below in PSYC 507, 508, or 510, the student has the option to retake that course or take the ASTAT equivalent. The equivalents for PSYC 507 and 508 are ASTAT 505 and 506, respectively.

- ii. Students should file a Department of Psychology [Graduate Student Committee Composition](#) form no later than after the completion of 12 credits of graduate work.
- iii. Students should participate in PSYC 590 each semester they are in-residence. Students can opt to register for one credit of PSYC 590. Research seminar meets once each week and is an opportunity for students to improve their ability to give and critically analyze a research presentation. Both of these skills will be crucial to your success.

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

ADMISSION TO THE DOCTORAL PROGRAM / QUALIFYING EXAMINATION

The NMSU Graduate School requires all students pass a qualifying examination prior to admission into the Ph.D. program.

- A. For students who have obtained their M.A. degree in Psychology at NMSU:
 - a. The Master's Oral Examination can serve as the Qualifying Examination for admission to the Ph.D. program. In order to be considered for admission into the Ph.D. program, the student must submit the following items to the chair of the graduate committee within four weeks of passing the Master's Oral Examination:
 - A CV, an unofficial transcript, and a one-page description of the student's plans/goals for Ph.D. program, including a brief description of the student's research program(s).
 - b. The admission decision will be made by the full faculty via either a secret ballot vote at a faculty meeting or via a confidential email vote to the department head. Faculty members may vote a) admit, b) do not admit, or c) abstain. All faculty members, including the department head and the student's advisor, have an equal vote. The vote will not be finalized until there are two or fewer abstentions.
 - c. Votes will be based on results of the admission vote of the student's M.A. committee members, willingness of the current advisor to continue advising the student or the willingness of a new advisor to do so, quality of the thesis document/defense, materials submitted by the student (as listed above), and the student's performance and professionalism in the graduate program. The student will be admitted into the Ph.D. program based on a simple majority "admit" vote. In the case of a tie, discussion must be continued until the tie is resolved.
- B. For students who have obtained their M.A. degree at another university or in another discipline:
 - a. The Psychology Department Graduate Director, in collaboration with the student's own doctoral committee, shall decide upon the nature of the Qualifying Examination. A student who has not completed a master's thesis that is considered adequate (e.g., a non-empirical thesis) may be required to do a master's thesis at NMSU.
 - b. In the case of students whose master's theses are considered inadequate, the department recommends that the form of the qualifying exam be the first-year project required of all new incoming graduate students. However, in some circumstances, the student's committee, with the approval of the graduate committee and the department head, may use a different method of exam. Also, the qualifying exam may include additional coursework at New Mexico State University.

- c. The qualifying exam must be completed within a student's first year at NMSU.
- d. If a student fails the exam, the student needs to complete a make-up exam by the end of the fall semester of their second year. The student's advisor, the Graduate Director, the department head, and an independent faculty member (someone who is not working with the student) will attend the make-up exam. The student must receive a passing score from the examiners before being allowed to continue in the program.

RESIDENCY REQUIREMENT

The minimum residence requirement for the doctoral degree includes at least two regular full-time enrollment semesters at New Mexico State University.

ELIGIBLE COURSEWORK

- The core course corresponding to the student's area of study (see below for eligible courses)
- 3 additional content courses (see below for eligible courses)
- Required statistics sequence: PSYC 507, PSYC 508, and PSYC 5010
- 6 additional credits in statistics/methods (see list of eligible psychology courses below).

Note: The additional required statistics/methods courses may be fulfilled by coursework in psychology or in another qualifying department (e.g., Applied Statistics). A ST505, A ST506, and A ST507 courses may not be used to fulfill this requirement because they correspond to PSYC 507, PSYC 508, and PSYC 509.

- At least 18 credits of PSYC 700 (Doctoral Dissertation).
- Total Credit Hours for the Ph.D.: The Graduate School requires doctoral students to complete a minimum of 18 credits of PSYC 700 (Doctoral Dissertation). Beyond that, there are no fixed credit hour requirements for the doctoral degree. However, a student should expect to accumulate a minimum of 40 to 70 credits beyond the M.A. degree requirements, including dissertation credit, to obtain approval of his/her Ph.D. program of study by the Graduate School.
- Residency Requirement: The minimum residence requirement for the doctoral degree includes at least two regular full-time enrollment semesters at New Mexico State University.

Core Courses: The following three courses will fulfill the core course requirement for both the M.A. and the Ph.D. program

- PSYC 524, Cognitive Psychology
- PSYC 527, Social Psychology
- PSYC 547, Engineering Psychology

Note: For both the M.A. and the Ph.D. programs, once a student fulfills the core requirement, the remaining two core courses can be considered content courses (i.e., students can enroll in either or both of them to fulfill the content course requirement).

All other courses are in one of the following three categories:

Content	Stat	Methods
PSYC 520, Learning Theory & Methodology	PSYC 507	PSYC 510, Computer Methodology
PSYC 522, Sensation & Perception Theory & Methodology	PSYC 508	PSYC 523, Methods in Cognitive Psychology
PSYC 540, History & Systems of Psychology		PSYC 529, Methods in Social Psychology
PSYC 570, Special Topics		PSYC 548, Methods in Engineering Psychology
		PSYC 550, Teaching of Psych

*Grandfather clause: Students enrolled in the M.A. or Ph.D. program prior to Fall 2016 can choose either the previous requirements or these requirements. However, either set of requirements must be chosen as a whole; specific elements of the two sets of requirements may not be mixed.

**PSYC 570, Special Topics may be considered content, stat, or methods depending on the specific content of the course.

Research Seminar (PSYC 590)

Students should participate PSYC 590 each semester they are in-residence. Students can opt to register for one credit of PSYC 590. Research seminar meets once each week and is an opportunity for students to improve their ability to give and critically analyze a research presentation. Both of these skills will be crucial to your success.

WORK-RELATED TRAINING REQUIREMENT

Students in the Ph.D. program must either:

1. Complete an internship of at least 3 months duration OR
2. Teach at least one 3-credit undergraduate course independently. Students must complete one of the following training programs prior to teaching:
 - a. PSYC 550 (Teaching of Psychology)
 - b. Thirty-six hours of teaching-related training at the [NMSU Teaching Academy](#) (e.g., the Teaching Scholars course) completed during the twelve months prior to teaching
 - c. Complete another training program that has been approved by the Department Head (e.g., team-teach with a faculty member).

- d. At least one month prior to the first-class meeting, student instructors must submit their course syllabus and required textbook(s) to be approved by the Department Head. Student instructors who do not obtain this approval may not be allowed to teach the course.

THE DOCTORAL COMMITTEE

The student, in consultation with their advisor, will form an advisory committee (also referred to as the doctoral committee and the graduate committee below). The committee will consist of five members who have appointments to the graduate faculty. The committee must have at least three members from the Psychology Department and one from outside of the department who will serve as the Dean's representative. If appropriate, one or more subject matter experts from another department may serve in place of one or more Psych faculty members. (Note that this requirement of five committee members exceeds the minimum set by the Graduate School, which only requires four.) In consultation with the committee chair, students should select as their Dean's Rep a faculty member who can offer content-relevant insights. Students who have declared a minor must have at least one representative from the minor area on their committee. The representative of the minor area can also serve as the Dean's representative. If appropriate, the advisory committee may also have a member from off campus (in addition to the required five members described above), as long as that person has earned at least a Ph.D. or equivalent degree. Each graduate student will submit the names of his/her advisory committee members and a justification for selecting each committee member to the department head using the Department of Psychology [Graduate Student Committee Composition Form](#). Subsequent changes in the committee must be submitted and justified in writing and must be agreed to by the advisor as well as the department head.

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

In May 2021, the Department of Psychology Faculty voted to revise the comprehensive examination procedures. Students who entered the Ph.D. program prior to Fall 2021 will have the option to choose whether to complete the comprehensive examination using the previous method. Both methods are described below.

Students who wish to take the pre-2021 version must fill out an acknowledgment form and submit this via email to the Graduate Director and their primary advisor prior to beginning their comprehensive exam. The selection form is available on the [Student Resources](#) page of the Psychology Department website.

2023 Comprehensive Examination

Purpose/Overview: The purpose of the comprehensive exam is to evaluate whether students possess the core competencies necessary to pursue independent research for

their dissertation. These core competencies include (a) critical thinking, (b) the ability to synthesize information from the scientific literature, (c) knowledge of proper experimental design and associated issues of measurement and statistical analysis, and (d) the ability to communicate scientific information clearly. The comprehensive exam will be offered twice per year, with start dates occurring two weeks before the Fall and Spring semesters. Off-cycle exams will only be permitted when extenuating circumstances are described and documented.

Format: The comprehensive exam includes two written examination phases and one oral defense across a single semester. Only students who successfully complete the first written exam will proceed to the second written exam and oral defense phase.

- a. *Common elements across Phases 1 and 2:* In each phase, students will write 2 APA-style essays (unless the questions specify another format) in double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font with page numbers. Each essay must include the essay prompt at the beginning of the document and be saved in separate .docx files with the file name format AggieID_Question# (this is to facilitate blind evaluation during Phase 1). Unless specified by the question, there is no page limit, but most questions can be answered in 10 – 15 pages. Additionally, students must take care to remove their name from the “Authorship” of the document they turn in.
- b. Students will have one calendar week to answer the questions and must work independently. Sharing questions or receiving help from other students or faculty is considered academic dishonesty. Receiving help from the NMSU Writing Center, however, is allowable and encouraged.
 - a. *Note:* Submissions with incorrect formats (e.g., bullet lists instead of APA-style text, file formats that cannot be opened) will not be graded unless the committee or question specifically requested an alternative format. Incorrectly formatted submissions will count as a failed attempt.
- c. *Phase 1 Written Exam:* At the cycle start date (see Example Timeline, below), students will receive emailed instructions and two questions from the Graduate Director. One question will require students to demonstrate competency in statistical analysis, similar to assignments used in PSYC 507 and PSYC 508. Specifically, students will be asked to generate an appropriate mock-dataset that fits the assumptions of a particular statistical test (the test will change across cycles). They will then analyze the data and write up (a) their process for creating the dataset, including the necessary code, and (b) an APA-style results section describing the outcome of the analysis. The second question will test students’ knowledge of experimental design, building upon area-specific reading lists (students in Social and Cognitive/Engineering will receive separate reading lists). Students taking the exam during the same cycle (regardless of which area they belong to) will receive the same Phase 1 questions, but the questions will be unique for each cycle of exams.
 - a. The area-specific reading lists for the second question will be provided on the Psychology Department website ([Student Resources](#)) at least two

months before the exam start date. The reading lists will be identified by Cycle (Fall – Spring) and Year.

- b. Students who identify as belonging to multiple areas (e.g., Social and Engineering) may choose which reading list to use for Phase 1. These students should consult their primary mentor prior while making this decision.
- d. *Phase 2 Written Exam*: Students who successfully pass Phase 1 (see Assessment, below) will proceed to Phase 2, which will examine their subject-specific expertise. The student will develop two topics and associated reading lists that, once approved, will be used by their individualized committee to create two questions. Students will select their own start date (see Step-by-Step Guide, below).
 - a. Students are encouraged to begin working on their topics and reading lists before Phase 1. This can be an ongoing discussion between the student and mentor as early as desired.
- e. *Oral Defense*: This meeting will consist of an oral defense of the Phase 2 written answers. If the answers are sufficiently clear on their own (see Assessment, below), the student will advance to candidacy on the basis of the written portion alone and no oral defense will be required. Students should proceed as though an oral defense will be held, unless they are told otherwise.

Step-By-Step Guide:

- a. Notice of Intent: At least three months prior to the cycle start date, students should email the Graduate Director to inform them of their intent to participate in the next cycle's exam phases.
- b. Cycle-Wide Reading List Dissemination: At least two months prior to the Phase 1 start date, the Social and Cognitive/Engineering reading lists will be posted on the Psychology Department website ([Student Resources](#)).
- c. Phase 1 Start Date: Two weeks prior to the start of the semester, students will receive their essay prompts/questions via email. Students may ask clarification questions by emailing the Graduate Director.
- d. Phase 1 Exam Period: Students have one calendar week to answer their questions and submit their essays to the Department Administrator (currently Danielle Blackburn), to maintain anonymity. The exam is "open book," and students may consult additional written sources beyond the initial reading list. Essays must be submitted by 5:00pm Mountain Time.
- e. Phase 1 Assessment: Within two weeks of the Phase 1 due date, the area faculty (and the Quantitative Committee for Question 1 only, pertaining to quantitative training) will evaluate the written answers blindly (names will only be linked to essays after all evaluations are made) and the Graduate Director will notify students of their pass/fail decisions based on numerical scores (see Assessment, below). Any narrative feedback that accompanied faculty scores will be included.
 - a. Although scoring is "blind," advisors will not participate in scoring their own students' essays.

- b. Faculty scores are due to the Graduate Director by 5:00pm Mountain at least three business days before feedback is due to students. Late scores will not be included in overall assessment of the students.
- c. The Graduate Director will circulate the scores and feedback amongst the area faculty prior to emailing the students. Any corrections or questions must be raised at least 24 hours before the feedback is due to students.
- f. Phase 2 Reading Lists: Within two weeks of passing Phase 1, students must email their topic proposals and reading lists (in the form of a bibliography containing 10-15 articles) to their individualized committee. Each topic proposal only needs to be one sentence describing the theme of the reading list. The committee will revise the lists, if necessary, and send approval via email within one week.
- g. Phase 2 Start Date: Upon approval of the reading lists, students must email their individualized committee (5 members, including a Dean's Rep, akin to the dissertation committee) to select a start date for the Phase 2 Exam Period. This start date must be at least 1 month prior to the last day of classes in that semester. Students will receive emailed instructions and questions on the start date they choose.
- h. Phase 2 Exam Period: Students will have one calendar week to answer the questions and submit their essays to the entire committee via email. The exam is "open book," and students may consult additional written sources beyond the initial reading lists. Answers are due by 5:00pm Mountain.
- i. Phase 2 Assessment: Each student's committee will evaluate the answers against the rubric posted online. Pass/fail decisions will be made based on numerical scores (see Assessment, below).
- j. Oral Defense: The oral defense should be scheduled for at least two weeks after the exam period ends. The meeting should be scheduled for 2 hours at a mutually agreed upon time and location (including "virtual" locations; we recommend using [when2meet](#) for scheduling). Students who pass on the basis of their written answers alone will be notified via email within 72 hours of the oral defense meeting.

Questions: Although the cycle-wide questions will differ each cycle and the subject-specific questions will differ for each student, sample questions may be obtained from the Graduate Director.

Assessment: The committees will evaluate students' answers against the rubrics available online ([Student Resources](#))

- Phase 1 Assessment
 - Average Scores > 3.0: Pass
 - Average Scores ≤ 3.0: Fail
 - Students must achieve a passing score on both questions to pass Phase 1 of the exam. If only one question is failed, students may revise and resubmit within 72 hours of receiving their score. If both questions are failed, the exam outcome will be a Fail.

- All decisions will be accompanied by narrative assessment, which will be particularly important for Fail decisions.
- Students who wish to discuss their feedback with the Graduate Director and their primary mentor are encouraged to do so.
- Phase 2 Assessment
 - Average Scores 4.5+: Average scores above 4.5 are eligible for passing without requiring an oral defense meeting.
 - Average Scores 3.0 – 4.5: Average scores above 3.0 and below 4.5 will result in an oral defense meeting.
 - Average Scores \leq 3.0: Average committee-wide scores of 3.0 or below will preempt the oral defense meeting and require the student to revise and resubmit their answers within 48 hours. Students will receive written feedback from their committee chair outlining the committee’s major concerns, which is intended to help the student guide their revisions. If the revisions do not achieve a committee-wide average above 3.0, the student will fail the comprehensive exam.

Re-takes: Students who fail Phase 1 may take the exam again in the next cycle. Students who fail Phase 2 may also take the exam again in the next cycle. Such students can skip Phase 1, but must form new reading lists for Phase 2. Students who fail the comprehensive exam twice will be dismissed from the program.

Clock Stopping, Timelines, and Expiration Dates:

- a. Clock Stopping: Students who experience unexpected personal hardship (e.g., illness, death of a loved one) during the exam period may request a clock stoppage from their committee. Requests should be in writing and detail the nature of the extraordinary circumstances. Whenever feasible, the request should also include the date the clock will resume. Requests will be granted at the discretion of the Graduate Director (Phase 1 exams) or student’s individualized committee (Phase 2 exams).
- b. Timelines: Students who do not adhere to the Phase 2 timelines in this policy and who have not requested clock stoppage must get emailed permission from all committee members to arrange an alternative Phase 2 time. If one committee member dissents, the student must continue their comprehensive exam process during the relevant dates in the next comps cycle.
- c. Expiration Dates: If more than 4 years have elapsed since the student passed the comprehensive exam and they have not yet proposed the dissertation, they must re-take the comprehensive exam.

Example timelines¹:

¹ Note: Specific dates are given for example only. If these dates fall on a weekend or holiday, the dates will be adjusted so that exams begin during the business week.

Exam Cycle	Notice of Intent	Phase 1 Reading List	Phase 1 Start Date	Phase 2 Reading List	Phase 2 Latest Start Date
Fall	May 1	June 1	August 1	Within 2 weeks of passing Phase 1	1 month prior to the day classes end in December
Spring	October 1	November 1	January 3	Within 2 weeks of passing Phase 1	1 month prior to the day classes end in May

Pre-2021 Comprehensive Examination

This is an inclusive evaluation of the student's mastery of the field of concentration. The examination includes both written and oral sections. The exact content is to be determined by the advisory committee in consultation with the student. Admission to candidacy for the doctoral degree requires adequate performance on the comprehensive examination.

1. Overview: Students identify 4 broad research areas and compile a preliminary reference list for each area. This list consists of key papers that represent the students' specific interests within each area. The committee agrees on 4 questions (one/area) and students answer each question using whatever readings are necessary. Answers are limited to a total of 50 pages (not counting references) and students have 6 months from receipt of the questions to complete the exam. Students are responsible for providing each committee member with a HARD copy of their completed responses, unless the committee member specifically requests an electronic copy. Students then orally defend their answers approximately two weeks after completing the written portion of the exam.
2. Format: Written exam and oral defense
3. Required meetings: A proposal meeting and an oral defense. The proposal meeting should be scheduled for one hour. At the proposal meeting, the student presents his/her committee with the preliminary reference list and the committee begins to discuss possible questions (with the student's input if desired by the committee).

The oral defense should be scheduled for two hours and will be held approximately 2 weeks after completion of the written exam. The contents of the

oral exam will be primarily focused on the student's answers and the papers included on the student's final reference list.

4. **Timing:** Consistent with the timeline included in the department's graduate program policy statement, students are expected to complete the comprehensive exams within 2 semesters after defending their M.A. thesis or completion of their qualifying exam (see the timeline for more information). Thus, students should hold a comps proposal meeting within one semester of defending or completion of the qualifying exam. After the comps proposal meeting with the student, the committee has 2 weeks to finalize the questions. The written portion of the exam must be finished within 6 months after receiving the questions from the committee. Failure to complete the written portion of the exam within 6 months will result in failure of the comprehensive exam. An oral defense will be held approximately 2 weeks after successful completion of the written exam.

5. **Contents:** Students identify 4 broad research areas, one of which should be their primary area of expertise and one of which should be quantitative, methodological, or philosophical in nature. The areas should be larger than one type of task, one person's work, or one theory. Examples of topics that are appropriately broad are motion perception, attitudes & behavior, and prospective memory. Students compile a preliminary reference list for each area consisting of key papers that represent the students' specific interests within each area. Students will include a final reference list with each answer. Everything included on the final reference list is eligible for examination/discussion during the oral defense.

6. **Questions:** Four questions (one/area) will be written collaboratively by the student's committee based on the student's preliminary reference list. All members of the committee must agree on the four questions prior to delivering the questions to the student. The questions should both test student's knowledge of the area and provoke reading and thought that will enhance the student's research productivity. The committee may elect to involve the student in the question-writing process (e.g., the student suggests a question and the committee revises it).

7. **Assessment:** The committee decides whether or not the student passes the exam after the oral defense (i.e., the student is given no feedback after the written portion of the exam). If two or more members of the committee vote that the student did not pass the exam, then the student must repeat the corresponding portion of the exam. For example, if the committee rules that the student's written answers were satisfactory but his/her oral defense was unsatisfactory, the student must repeat the oral defense. Students may be required to repeat the written portion, the oral defense, or both.

8. Ground rules for written portion of exam: The written portion of the exam is "take-home" and "open-book." Students are expected to read whatever literature is necessary to provide thoughtful and comprehensive answers to each question, regardless of whether the papers were included on their "interest list." Students may consult with their advisor and/or committee for clarification of the questions but otherwise may not discuss their ideas, readings, or answers with any faculty members (at NMSU or otherwise). Answers to all four questions are limited to a total of 50 pages (e.g., approximately 12 pages/question) not including the final reference lists.

9. Stopping the clock: Students may ask permission from the Graduate Committee to stop the 6-month completion clock in the event of extraordinary circumstances. Requests should be in writing, should detail the nature of the extraordinary circumstances, and should list a specific date on which the 6-month clock will resume. Requests will be granted at the discretion of the Graduate Committee.

10. Expiration date: Beginning with oral defenses held in Spring 2015, if more than 4 years have elapsed since the date of passing oral defense of the comprehensive exam, the student will be required to take another comprehensive exam before admission to the dissertation defense meeting.

APPLICATION AND ADVANCEMENT TO CANDIDACY

A student will be formally advanced to candidacy for the Ph.D. upon the successful completion of the comprehensive examination, the recommendation of the student's doctoral committee, and the approval of the graduate dean.

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION PROPOSAL MEETING

A doctoral dissertation in our department is a written description of original research conducted by the student. The student's dissertation committee must approve a dissertation proposal document before it is conducted. This approval is obtained at a Doctoral Dissertation Proposal Meeting attended by the student, their advisor, and the student's dissertation committee. The approval of the committee and any required changes in the project should be documented using the department's [Thesis/Dissertation Proposal Approval Form](#).

At least one week before the meeting, the student shall present a written description of the research proposal to each member of the advisory committee. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the merit or lack thereof of the proposed research and to suggest whatever changes in it that are deemed necessary to make it a worthwhile scientific effort. This objective is more easily met if the proposal document is in final Ph.D. dissertation form save for the Results, Discussion, and Conclusions. It is presumed that

the student will have discussed the proposed research with their dissertation committee prior to writing the Ph.D. proposal document.

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION AND FINAL EXAMINATION

1. Any student advanced to candidacy for the Ph.D. must register for three credits of dissertation (PSYC 700) each regular semester until the Graduate School has approved the dissertation.
2. Dissertation Preparation should total at least 18 credits of PSYC 700.
3. Students may not enroll in PSYC 700 until after successful completion of the qualifying exam.
4. The Department encourages students to orally present an early version of their completed dissertation research to their committee or to the Department prior to writing the final document and defending it.
5. The committee chair, or a majority of committee members, will approve of the dissertation document prior to scheduling an oral defense. If timing does not allow for reading of the document prior to scheduling the meeting, a discussion will be held at the beginning of the defense (with the student temporarily dismissed) to decide if the committee wishes to let the student proceed or not.
6. Not later than 14 working days before the date of the final examination, the candidate must personally deliver a final copy of the dissertation to each member of the final examination committee.
7. Following the final examination and approval by the dissertation committee, a copy of the dissertation is presented to the graduate editor at least ten working days before graduation.
8. The final examination must be completed at least two weeks before the date set for the commencement exercises at which the student expects to obtain the degree.