

For Honors Students Interested in Senior Honors Theses/Projects in Psychology:

Department of Psychology Empirical Senior Thesis Guidelines

Requirements

Psychology major

Junior or senior status (60+ credits)

GPA > 3.2

Completion of two or more credit hours of Psyc 494

Completion of Psyc 304

Note: one or more requirements may be waived if the thesis chairperson is willing to draft a memo that explains which requirement(s) are being waived and why; this memo should be attached to the committee selection form

Timeline

Committee selection required for registration in Psyc 489—committee comprised of one full-time faculty member in the Department of Psychology and one additional member (who may be from another department if the student and chair believe this is the best option for the project)

Prospectus must be completed in first semester and is required for subsequent enrollment in Psyc 489 (or Hon 489 for Honors students)

Formal defense must take place by Reading and Review day during the second semester.

Students are also strongly encouraged to present their work in a more public forum.

Forms

1. Committee selection
2. Prospectus meeting
3. Final defense

Completed forms are routed through UG director for approval

Description of Expectations

Psychology majors may decide to complete a Senior Thesis prior to graduation as additional preparation for graduate study in our discipline. Assuming you meet the minimum requirements (psychology major, 60+ credits completed, GPA > 3.2, completion of 2 or more credit hours of Psyc 494, and completion of Psyc 304), we encourage you to consider completing a Senior thesis research project. A typical Senior Thesis (see end of this document for details) project in our department will require enrollment in 3 credits of PSYC 489 in one semester, and then 3 credits of HON 489 in the next semester.

Our department regards Senior Theses (PSYC 489), Master's Theses (PSYC 998), and Doctoral Dissertations (PSYC 999) as similar in one fundamental way. They all require an empirical study to test predictions regarding the nature of associations among variables. If you decide to complete a senior thesis be prepared to construct two or three hypotheses that can be tested using data that you collect or obtain for secondary analyses. Think long and hard about the constructs of you would like to study and then contact a department faculty member who might be interested in overseeing your thesis. You should contact a faculty member to discuss your thesis during the semester prior to beginning the thesis process. If you are unsure who to approach or what timeline to follow, contact the undergraduate director for guidance.

As you have learned in your courses, all manuscripts that report the findings of a research project are organized using the same basic organizational structure: Abstract (< 200 words), Introduction (literature review, rationale for current study, and hypotheses), Method (with subheadings for Participants, Materials, and Procedure), Results, Discussion (including limitations and future directions), and References. While there is room for individuality, your final manuscript should adhere to APA Style guidelines and be similar to those published in peer-reviewed psychology journals. While some level of qualitative analysis is common in psychology publications, all Senior Thesis and higher-level projects in psychology should involve some quantitative analysis.

While Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations are expected to include an often lengthy and exhaustive literature review as demonstrations of scholarship capabilities, the department views Senior Thesis projects as an opportunity to practice concise scientific writing. Most journals limit submissions to less than 30 pages and you should plan to draft a manuscript appropriate for journal submission. If you have questions about an appropriate length for your project, this should be discussed with your committee.

The Senior Thesis committee should be comprised of at least two faculty members—one chairperson (a.k.a. advisor) and one additional member. Your committee chairperson must be a full-time faculty member from the Department of Psychology. Your additional committee member should be chosen in consultation with your committee chairperson. In order to register for the first semester of Psyc 489, you must complete the necessary form to designate your committee members.

After you have designated a committee for your thesis, you will work with your advisor to draft an Introduction and Method section for your project. After your advisor approves, you will circulate this document to your committee. You are expected to also prepare a presentation in which you describe your hypotheses, support for your hypotheses based on available literature, and details about the method you intend to employ to complete your study. The committee will ask you questions during the presentation and decide whether to approve your project in its current form or whether further clarification is necessary. Once all of your materials and design are approved, you and your committee will complete the thesis prospectus form and you will be allowed to register for a subsequent semester of Psyc 489. You will also then be authorized to pursue approval from the UND Institutional Review Board (IRB) to begin data collection.

Your advisor will assist you with analysis and interpretation of your results as well as drafting the final components to your manuscript. With your advisor's approval, you will circulate the final manuscript draft to your committee and schedule a one-hour defense meeting. The defense meeting is also organized around a PowerPoint presentation that focuses primarily on your Results and Discussion sections of your thesis document. The committee will ask you to leave the room at the end of the meeting to discuss your performance, determine a final grade for your project, and complete the thesis defense form.

While a Senior Thesis may sound like a lofty ambition, we ask you to think of it as just another research project. Our goal in the department is to teach students at all levels to efficiently move through the process of hypothesis formation, data collection and analysis, manuscript creation, journal submission, and ultimately publication. Projects at all levels are far more similar than different, and our requirements for the Senior Thesis are quite practical since they mirror those that you will be facing when you attempt to get your work into print after your final defense meeting. We also strongly encourage students to consider presenting their final project in a more public forum, such as a poster or presentation at a research conference.

Specific Instructions for Honors Psychology Students: 2 Paths

Path 1: Traditional (Empirical) Psychology Research Thesis [described above]

Students in the Honors program who are interested in conducting an empirical research project (especially recommended for students who intend to pursue graduate school for psychology) will register for 3 credits of PSYC 489 while they develop their prospectus and then 3 credits of Hon 489 during the semester they intend to complete and defend their thesis. Thus, students following this path should plan to spend an entire year working on their thesis.

Path 2: Non-Empirical Integrative Paper

Students who are not interested in conducting an empirical research project can follow a different path. In particular, students who do not intend to attend graduate school in psychology may favor a non-empirical option. Such students can choose to instead write an integrative or interdisciplinary paper for their Senior Project, and simply sign up for 3 credits of HON 489 in their last year (without taking PSYC 489). For this option, students will not need a full "committee," but simply one primary faculty advisor. Students following this path can complete their Honors project in one semester.