

Department of Psychology Empirical Senior Thesis

Prerequisites

- Psychology major
- Junior or senior status (60+ credits)
- GPA > 3.2
- 2 or more credit hours of PSYC 494: Advanced Individual Research
- Completion of PSYC 304: Advanced Research Methods

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

The Empirical Senior Thesis (or Empirical Honors Thesis, for HON students) is a two-semester sequence. During the first semester, students develop a project proposal and present this proposal to their committee and begin data collection. During the second semester, students complete data collection, conduct data analysis, and finish writing their thesis document.

Committee selection is required to initially enroll in PSYC 489. This committee should be comprised of a chairperson who is a full-time faculty member from the Department of Psychology and one additional member. The second committee member may be from another department if the student and chair believe this is the best option for the project.

The thesis prospectus meeting must be completed during the first semester and is required for subsequent enrollment in PSYC 489 (or HON 489, for HON students).

The final thesis document should be submitted to committee members by Reading and Review Day of the second semester.

Students are expected to present their work in a public forum. Acceptable options should be discussed with Dr. Terrell, the Director of Undergraduate Programs in Psychology.

Forms

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

Forms can be obtained from the Director of Undergraduate Programs in Psychology.

Description of Process and 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* project in our department will require enrollment in 3 credits of PSYC 489 over the course of two semesters (for a total of 6 credits of Psyc 489).

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 and submit this form to the Director of Undergraduate Programs in Psychology.

After you have designated a committee for your thesis, you will work with your thesis advisor (chairperson) 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 determine a format for public dissemination of your results. One way to do this is to schedule a "thesis defense" with your committee members. This type of meeting is organized around a PowerPoint presentation that focuses primarily on your Results and Discussion sections of your thesis document. Other options for public dissemination may include giving a presentation to a class, creating a video, or presenting a poster at the UNDergraduate showcase. The type of dissemination you choose should be approved by your committee and ideally, your committee should be able to attend or view any presentation you create.

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.

*Students in the Honors program 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.

A Special Note for Honors Students

Honors students are required to complete a Senior Honors Project as part of the degree requirements for the program. Honors students may choose either the one-semester Senior Honors Project option for their degree requirements *or* they may pursue a two-semester Senior Empirical Thesis as outlined above. In essence, there are two paths for Honors Students.

Path 1—Senior Honors Project (one semester of HON 489)

For students who are not interested in conducting an empirical research project, the default Senior Honors Project is a good option. In particular, students who do not intend to attend graduate school in psychology may favor this non-empirical option. Under this option, students are expected to write an integrative or interdisciplinary paper for their Senior Project and sign up for 3 credits of HON 489 during their last year. For this option, students do not need a "committee" of two faculty members, but instead choose one primary faculty advisor to work with them on paper development. Students following this path can complete their Honors project in one semester.

Path 2—Empirical Senior Thesis (one semester of PSYC 489 and one semester of HON 489)

This path is for students in the Honors program who are interested in conducting an empirical research project. This is an option ideally suited for students who intend to pursue graduate school in psychology or a related field. Students pursuing this option will register for 3 credits of PSYC 489 while they develop their prospectus followed by 3 credits of HON 489 during the semester they intend to complete and present their thesis. Thus, students following this path should plan to spend an entire year working on their thesis.