

# **Graduate Student Handbook**

Department of Psychology

Stephen F. Austin State University

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## INTRODUCTION

The master's program is designed to augment the credentials of individuals who are interested in applying for admission to doctoral programs in psychology. The curriculum will increase individuals' chances of being accepted upon application to doctoral programs by enabling them to earn grades in graduate-level courses, and to gain valuable research and teaching experience. In the second year of study, students complete a thesis. Students may also have the opportunity to gain experience teaching introductory level courses under the supervision of one of our faculty members.

Our degree plan may also be of interest to individuals who would like to earn a master's degree in psychology as a means of achieving their professional goals, such as acquiring advanced research skills to apply in government and industry as researcher consultants, data analysts, mental health workers, administrators, and managers. We envision our curriculum being of considerable value to individuals currently in the workforce, who have had some coursework in psychology (although not necessarily a psychology major) and would now like to enhance their professional skills and advancement potential. Thus, the program can meet the needs of both those already pursuing careers and those attempting to gain admission to a doctoral program in psychology.

Students are taught to conduct theory-driven research to advance our knowledge of psychological processes through a wide array of didactic courses and research experiences.

For additional questions, please contact the Graduate Program Coordinator, MA Program, at (936) 468-5117 or [graduatepsychology@sfasu.edu](mailto:graduatepsychology@sfasu.edu).

**All psychology graduate students are expected to have a thorough familiarity with this guide but also to make themselves thoroughly familiar with departmental materials, rules, regulations, and responsibilities through other sources and through the Graduate Advisor.**

The Stephen F. Austin State University Graduate Bulletin, is also a valuable official administrative document regulating graduate school policies, procedures, regulations, programs, and curricula. **All graduate students must assume full responsibility for familiarity with its provisions as well as full responsibility for the requirements of their chosen degree program.** Students should bear in mind that information and changes might be announced through official administrative notices and Graduate Office newsletters. Moreover, graduate students can find the important information about university-level graduate student policies procedures on the Graduate School's homepage (<http://www2.sfasu.edu/graduate/>).

Psychology Graduate Faculty members are committed to the personal, professional, and academic growth of each student enrolled in our MA program. To ensure that students who enroll in our program have rigorous training, faculty members work hard to create a diverse range of opportunities for creative research endeavors, and dynamic learning experiences both inside and outside of the classroom.

Psychology graduate students may periodically need information on resources, coursework, thesis procedures, preparation for graduation, etc. Keeping in mind that flexibility, vigilance, and cooperation are necessary on the part of psychology graduate students to ensure smooth advancement to a higher degree, students may use this handbook as a guide in navigating their progression through our MA program.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

The Graduate School at Stephen F. Austin State University functions legislatively under the Board of Regents appointed by the Governor of the State of Texas and confirmed by the State Senate. While the Board sets general policies for the entire university, the daily tasks of management rest directly upon university administrative teams and departmental faculty and staff. The Dean of the Graduate School is responsible for the academic program of all graduate students, for supervision of admissions, academic documentation, thesis registration and completion, as well as for carrying out the assigned policies and standards recommended by the Graduate Council and approved by the administration and the Board of Regents. The Graduate Office is open Monday – Friday from 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. It is located in Dugas Liberal Arts North, Room 423, (936) 468-2807.

At the department level, the department Chair coordinates and facilitates the work and activities of the professional faculty, promotes the educational needs and goals of the students, directs the departmental links with the local, regional, and state communities and maintains the academic services crucial to the profession. Under the Chair, appointed committees and individual faculty members carry out the work of the department. For graduate students, a Graduate Coordinator works closely in structuring and monitoring their progress through the program. The Graduate Coordinator is assisted by a Graduate Program Committee.

## **TUITION, FEES, & ENROLLMENT**

It is imperative, however, that entering graduate students make certain that all required financial and academic paperwork is completed as soon as possible. Tuition, fees, and deposits are due and payable prior to the time of registration. **Failure to pay correctly within the time schedules mandated by the university cancels all expressed or implied commitments for classes.** A student seeking reinstatement after a cancellation of classes is subject to a reinstatement charge. An installment payment program encompassing tuition, fees, deposits, and room and board is available for students who are financially unable to cope with full cost at the beginning of a semester. In addition, short-term loans may be available through the Office of Financial Aid. This plan is fully detailed in the Graduate Bulletin.

Students receive bills or invoices for tuition, fees, etc., several weeks in advance of each semester and can take care of all financial responsibilities or arrangements by going to the Business Office, Austin Building, Room 204, (936) 468-6960. Students with assistantships, loans, etc., may also need to check their financial status through the Financial Aid Office in the Austin Building, Room 104, (936) 468-2403.

**A student must be admitted as an overlap student or admitted to the Graduate School in order to enroll in any course taken for graduate credit.**

### **THE PROGRAM**

The Graduate Program of the Department of Psychology is designed to train candidates to be effective as well as productive scholars and teachers, to introduce students to critical methodology in the studying and the teaching of psychology.

**The department offers graduate students one degree option: an MA with thesis requiring 36 hours.**

All students are expected to build a strong foundation and show competency in a required “core”. Students must complete and research core courses (PSY 501, PSY 507, PSY 585) with a B or better before enrolling in Thesis Writing (PSY 590).

<b><i>Core Courses</i></b>	
Course Title (Course number)	Required credits
Advanced Statistics I (PSY 501)	3
Advanced Statistics II (PSY 507)	3
Ethics & Research in Psychology (PSY 517)	3
Advanced Research Design (PSY 585)	3
Teaching of Psychology (PSY 525)	3
Proseminar (PSY 500)	3

Students will also complete a minimum of 4 courses (12 hours) selected in collaboration with the graduate advisor from either of the two lists below:

<b><i>Social/Developmental Concentration Courses</i></b>	
Course Title (Course number)	Required credits
Advanced Social (PSY 561)	3
Advanced Developmental Psychology (PSY 526)	3
Advanced Applied Psychology (PSY 534)	3
Advanced Psychopathology (PSY 518)	3
Biopsychology (PSY 504)	3

<b><i>Applied Cognitive Concentration Courses</i></b>	
Course Title (Course number)	Required credits
Cognitive Psychology (PSY 508)	3
Advanced Tests and Measurement (PSY 535)	3
Organizational Psychology (PSY 514)	3
Decision Making (PSY 516)	3
Human Factors Engineering (539)	3

## THESIS REQUIREMENTS

MA Degree requirements of the Department of Psychology include a formal Master's thesis based upon research for all students. In the process of developing a thesis, it is the responsibility of the graduate student to follow the guidelines below in addition to the university thesis policies and procedures (<http://www.sfasu.edu/graduate/108.asp>).

**The Thesis Proposal:** The thesis proposal is a critical component of the thesis project. It will be the basis for the initial review of the research by the thesis committee, and is a contract of sorts in that, if the research is approved and then carried out as decided at the proposal meeting, the thesis methods and design will not be considered at fault at the defense meeting. By signing the Proposal Approval Form (See Graduate School webpage) the committee is agreeing to this. The thesis chairperson should chair the meeting (e.g., welcoming the outside committee member, introducing the student, and discussing the order of events). The student will be asked to give a brief (usually 15-20 minutes) presentation of the proposal, and then the members of the committee will question the student. The purpose of the proposal meeting is to make the research plan be as good as it can be. It is, essentially, a working session in which the committee works as colleagues with the student to be sure that nothing has been overlooked in the planning and design of the research. Typically the meeting lasts about an hour to an hour and a half. The student should prepare an APA style research proposal summarizing their proposed thesis study. Each student should speak with his or her thesis chair about the length and breadth of the document. It is suggested that the student provide copies of this proposal document to the committee members approximately one week before the scheduled oral proposal presentation. Students must propose in the semester that precedes their defense. The student should plan to defend their thesis in the Spring semester of their second year, as this is by far the preference of the department. Thus, the student should propose in the Fall semester of their second year. Previous students who have been most successful at graduating in 2 years, have proposed their thesis studies in October or November before their defense.

**The Thesis Defense:** An initial thesis defense draft must be completed before the thesis examination/defense. Each student should speak with their thesis chair about expectations regarding the length and breadth of this final thesis document. The initial thesis defense draft must meet the following requirements:

- Should include a complete Abstract, Introduction, Method, Results, Discussion, and Reference section along with Appendices.
- Mechanically and stylistically correct. (According to APA Style guidelines and SFA formatting requirements-see below)
- If figures and tables are included, these should be formatted in APA style approved by the thesis chair

The graduate student must take a draft of the thesis to be checked by the Graduate School before filing the application for the thesis defense. The Graduate School is primarily concerned with university prescribed non-APA style related formatting. Templates and guidelines are provided

on their website (<http://www.sfasu.edu/graduate/108.asp>). It is the student's responsibility to attend to these guidelines prior to submitting their draft for review in the Graduate School office.

The application for **Thesis Examination Form**

(<http://www.sfasu.edu/graduate/documents/thesis-exam.pdf>) can be submitted only after the thesis draft is submitted to and approved by the Graduate School. This form must be filed in the Graduate School at least one week before the defense and no later than three (3) weeks before the day of commencement. See the Graduate School web site for specific dates. A copy of the final thesis draft must be submitted to each member of the thesis defense committee and one copy to the Graduate School at least one week prior to the defense.

The thesis defense is held at a time and place agreed upon by the graduate student and all members of the thesis committee. In the Department of Psychology, we encourage students and faculty within the department to attend MA thesis defense presentations. A closed meeting between the graduate student and their committee will follow each defense presentation. The student must inform the graduate coordinator of their defense time and place so that advertisement can be arranged in advance. The thesis chairperson should chair the thesis defense meeting (e.g., welcoming the outside committee member, introducing the student, and discussing the order of events). The student will be asked to give a brief (usually 30 minutes) but comprehensive presentation of the thesis study, and then the members of the committee will question the student.

If the thesis defense committee requires changes or additions to the thesis more extensive than just improvements in language, punctuation, format, or illustrations, approval of the thesis shall be delayed until each committee member has a chance to examine a new draft incorporating the changes.

Following the thesis defense, all changes and corrections required by the thesis defense committee and the Graduate School must be incorporated into the final draft. Students should submit their edited document to their committee no more than 3 weeks following their defense date. This is an important time span for committee members to keep in mind in deciding whether the students had successfully defended their thesis. If the student's edits are likely to take more than 3 weeks, then the committee should reconsider whether the student has indeed successfully defended their thesis. A copy of the final edited thesis document must be submitted to the thesis committee chair and to the thesis committee members who request copies no more than 3 weeks after the defense.

Once this edited document is inspected and approved by the thesis committee, the graduate student then submits the revised thesis to the Graduate Office for approval. After receiving approval from the Graduate School, the student must have a minimum of four copies of the thesis made that meet all specifications of the thesis guide. The final thesis must be signed by each member of the thesis advisory committee and must be on 20# white paper. Please note that the student is encouraged to bring 4 printed copies of the Thesis Signature Page (<http://www.sfasu.edu/graduate/documents/form-b.pdf>) and one copy of the Report of the Thesis Examination to the defense meeting. The Graduate School should email the Report of the Thesis Examination to the thesis chair prior to thesis defense meeting.