



SAINT LOUIS  
UNIVERSITY

Saint Louis University  
Program Assessment Plan

**Program (Major, Minor, Core): Experimental Psychology Graduate Program**

**Department: Psychology**

**College/School: Arts & Sciences**

**Person(s) Responsible for Implementing the Plan: the Program Director is Dr. Kimberly Powlishta**

**Date Submitted: 11-24-2015**

Program Learning Outcomes	Curriculum Mapping	Assessment Methods	Use of Assessment Data
<i>What do you expect all students who complete the program to know, or be able to do?</i>	<i>Where is the outcome learned/assessed (courses, internships, student teaching, clinical, etc.)?</i>	<i>How do students demonstrate their performance of the program learning outcomes? How does the program measure student performance? Distinguish your direct measures from indirect measures.</i>	<i>How does the program use assessment results to recognize success and "close the loop" to inform additional program improvement? How/when is this data shared, and with whom?</i>

<p>Students will become competent in the conceptualization, design, conducting, analysis, and reporting of psychological research.</p>	<p>The outcome is learned /assessed through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Completion of and performance on the thesis (for students who enter the program pre-Master's degree) and the dissertation (for all students)</li> <li>b. Working with the research mentor and other faculty members or students on other research</li> <li>c. Completion of (and performance in) three required research methods and statistics classes</li> <li>d. Presentation of research findings in a peer-reviewed forum outside of the university by the time the Ph.D. is completed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Following each student's defense of the thesis or dissertation, committee members will complete a set of 20 5-point ratings (1=poor; 5=superior) assessing multiple aspects of each of the major sections of the thesis or dissertation document (see attached "Olson Awards Ratings Ballots").</li> <li>b. Grades in PSY 5840 (Experimental Psychology Research Vertical Team) will be reviewed to assess performance on other research-related activities</li> <li>c. At student evaluation meetings, the full program faculty will meet to discuss each student's progress once per semester (for students in their first year of the program) or academic year (for more advanced students), rating the student's "research progress" and "research quality" on a 3-point scale (inadequate, adequate, superior; see attached).</li> <li>d. Grades in the following three required statistics and research methods courses, taken during the first year of the program, will be reviewed: PSY 5080 (Advanced Quantitative Research Methods); PSY 5790 (Applied Univariate Statistics in Behavioral Science); PSY 6500 (Applied Multivariable and Multivariate Statistics in Behavioral Science).</li> <li>e. In addition, whether the student has given a first-authored research presentation (poster or paper) at a peer reviewed conference and/or obtained a peer reviewed publication will be noted, particularly for students in their final year of the program (note: students provide this information on their annual Student Activity Reports; see attached).</li> </ul>	<p>Currently, these outcomes are assessed at the individual student level. Results of the student evaluation meetings are shared with each student by the research mentor following those meetings. Students also have access to their individual grades. When appropriate resources are identified (e.g., for data entry), we will begin to assess these outcomes at the program level, identifying program-level definitions of successful performance when collapsed across individual students.</p>
--	--	---	---

<p>Students will display broad professional knowledge in the field of Experimental Psychology and more specialized knowledge in their area of concentration (i.e., cognitive neuroscience, developmental psychology, social psychology) and in their topic of research expertise.</p>	<p>The outcome is learned /assessed through:</p> <p>a. Performance on the written preliminary examination, as assessed by the faculty examination committee (see attached description of the examination).</p> <p>b. Performance on the doctoral oral examination, as assessed by the faculty examination committee (see attached description of the examination).</p> <p>c. Completion of and performance in core courses reflecting the major areas of Experimental Psychology</p>	<p>a. Each student's written preliminary exam will be graded by the three-person faculty examination committee as "accepted", "accepted pending minor revisions", "revise and resubmit", or "rejected". Ultimate acceptance indicates that the student has demonstrated comprehensive knowledge of the concentration area as reflected in the paper's topic, has addressed issues from outside the concentration area that have relevance to the selected topic, and has addressed the historical context of the topic (among other criteria).</p> <p>b. Each student's doctoral oral exam performance will be graded by the four-person faculty examination committee as passing (with varying levels of distinction, as specified by Graduate Education) or failing. A passing grade indicates that the students displayed knowledge of key fundamental concepts in general psychology, the ability to integrate knowledge from diverse areas within psychology, and the ability to express expert knowledge within the chosen concentration area.</p> <p>c. Grades in the following four required "core" courses in Experimental Psychology will be reviewed: PSY 5120 (Memory and Cognition), PSY 5130 (Neuropsychology), PSY 5250 OR PSY 5260 (Cognitive Development or Social Development), and PSY 5300 (Advanced Social Psychology).</p> <p>d. Faculty members will meet and discuss each student's progress once per semester (for students in their first year of the program) or academic year (for more advanced students), rating the student's "academic progress" and "academic quality" (among other characteristics) on a 3-point scale (inadequate, adequate, superior; see attached). Information used in this evaluation is obtained from the annual Student Activity Report (completed by the student) and as provided by the mentor and relevant course instructors.</p>	<p>Currently, these outcomes are assessed at the individual student level. Results of the student evaluation meetings are shared with each student by the research mentor following those meetings. Students also have access to their individual grades, to the results of their preliminary exam (as provided by the committee), and to whether they passed or failed the doctoral oral exam (as provided officially by the office of graduate education). When appropriate resources are identified (e.g., for data entry), we will begin to assess these outcomes at the program level, identifying program-level definitions of successful performance when collapsed across individual students.</p>
---	--	--	--

<p>Students will display an understanding of diversity and ethics issues as they apply to psychological research, teaching, and professional development as an Experimental Psychologist.</p>	<p>The outcome is learned /assessed through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Performance on the written preliminary examination, as assessed by the faculty examination committee (see attached description of the examination).</li> <li>b. Completion of and performance in the program's ethics course and the department's diversity course, as assessed by course instructors.</li> <li>c. Satisfactory completion of the CITI (Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative) training on the ethical use of human subjects.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Each student's written preliminary exam will be graded by the three-person faculty examination committee as "accepted", "accepted pending minor revisions", "revise and resubmit", or "rejected". Ultimate acceptance indicates (among other things) that, when relevant, the student has discussed specific ethical issues tied to the chosen topic and has addressed the topic from a diversity of perspectives; when relevant, this discussion can include issues of human diversity.</li> <li>b. Grades in the following two required courses will be reviewed: PSY 6030 (Human Diversity) and PSY 6800 (Ethics and Professional Issues).</li> <li>c. Students will submit completion reports for the CITI human subjects training to their PSY 5080 instructor. Students must satisfactorily complete all quizzes for the Social/ Behavior Research and/or the Biomedical Research courses (as determined by the type of research to be conducted by the student) in order to pass the training.</li> </ul>	<p>Currently, these outcomes are assessed at the individual student level. Students have access to their individual grades, to the results of their preliminary exam (as provided by the committee), and to their performance on CITI quizzes. When appropriate resources are identified (e.g., for data entry), we will begin to assess these outcomes at the program level, identifying program-level definitions of successful performance when collapsed across individual students.</p>
---	---	--	--

<p>Students will display professional development by acquiring skills in the areas of written and oral communication, teaching, and/or general professionalism.</p>	<p>The outcome is learned /assessed through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Written and oral communication are required, practiced, and assessed in most of the advanced coursework taken in the program, through completion and defense of the thesis and dissertation, and through completion of the written preliminary and doctoral oral exams.</li> <li>b. Teaching skills (if relevant to the individual student) are acquired through completion of the Teaching of Psychology Course and/or the Certificate in University Teaching Skills (CUTS) program.</li> <li>c. General professionalism is acquired through mentoring and faculty feedback throughout the program.</li> </ul>	<p>Faculty members will meet and discuss each student's progress once per semester (for students in their first year of the program) or academic year (for more advanced students), rating the student's "professional skill acquisition" and "personal and professional development" (among other characteristics) on a 3-point scale (inadequate, adequate, superior; see attached). Faculty reports of the student's oral communication skills (as demonstrated during classes or during, local, conference, or thesis/dissertation presentations) and written communication skills (as displayed in coursework, the written thesis/dissertation, or the written preliminary exam) will contribute to the written and oral communication components of these ratings. Attendance at colloquia and brown bags, mentoring skills when working with undergraduates in the laboratory, and treatment of others (peers, faculty members, students, and research participants) with respect (all as reported by faculty members) will contribute to adequate or superior ratings on the general professionalism component of these items. When relevant, grades in PSY 6000 (Teaching of Psychology, an elective course), completion of the Certificate in University Teaching Skills (CUTS) through the Reinert Center for Transformative Teaching and Learning, and teaching evaluations (for students who have taught a course independently) also will be considered in making these ratings.</p>	<p>Currently, these outcomes are assessed at the individual student level. Results of the student evaluation meetings are shared with each student by the research mentor following those meetings. When appropriate resources are identified (e.g., for data entry), we will begin to assess these outcomes at the program level, identifying program-level definitions of successful performance when collapsed across individual students.</p>
---	--	--	---

1. **It is not recommended to try and assess (in depth) all of the program learning outcomes every semester. It is best practice to plan out when each outcome will be assessed and focus on 1 or 2 each semester/academic year. Describe the responsibilities, timeline, and the process for implementing this assessment plan.**

Many of these outcomes are assessed every year during the annual student evaluation meeting. Other outcomes are assessed when each student reaches the appropriate milestone in the program (e.g., defending the thesis or dissertation, taking the relevant course, completing the written preliminary or doctoral oral examinations).

2. **Please explain how these assessment efforts are coordinated with Madrid (courses and/or program)?**

They are not. Madrid does not have an Experimental Psychology graduate program.

3. **The program assessment plan should be developed and approved by all faculty in the department. In addition, the program assessment plan should be developed to include student input and external sources (e.g., national standards, advisory boards, employers, alumni, etc.). Describe the process through which your academic unit created this assessment plan. Include the following:**

Following a meeting of the full program faculty, a committee consisting of the program director and one faculty member representing each of the other two concentrations of the program met to draft the set of learning outcomes and assessment plans. This draft was then shared with the full program faculty which, after suggested revisions, resulted in the current draft of the plan.

- a. Timeline regarding when or how often this plan will be reviewed and revised. (This could be aligned with program review.)

We do not yet have a definitive answer to this question, but may plan to review/revise the plan every 3 years or so.

- b. How students were included in the process and/or how student input was gathered and incorporated into the assessment plan.

The Experimental Psychology graduate student representative was present at all program faculty meetings at which the plan was discussed and approved.

- c. What external sources were consulted in the development of this assessment plan?

Guidelines from the American Psychological Association were reviewed, although many of them are more relevant for undergraduate than for graduate programs.

- d. Assessment of the manageability of the plan in relation to departmental resources and personnel

Although the plan is manageable at the level of collecting the required information from individual students, we do not have resources available for combining this information across students. That is, no administrative staff members have been assigned to enter the data in a format that will allow for program-level analysis, as the Experimental Psychology Program, despite having approximately 15 faculty members and 30 graduate students, has essentially no secretarial support beyond completion of paperwork to assign graduate student assistantships.

## Attachments



## Olson Awards Ratings Ballot

*Instructions: Please complete both sides of this form. When you are finished, enclose your ballot in a sealed envelope and return to the chairperson of the student's thesis or dissertation committee.*

Date of Oral Defense \_\_\_\_\_

Circle one:                      Thesis                                      Dissertation

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

	Poor			Superior	
I. Introduction					
1. Originality of the Problem	1	2	3	4	5
2. Importance and significance of the Problem	1	2	3	4	5
II. Literature Review					
1. History of the Problem	1	2	3	4	5
2. Theoretical formulations relation to the Problem	1	2	3	4	5
3. Critical review of the literature	1	2	3	4	5
4. Clarity of conceptual hypotheses and problem statement	1	2	3	4	5
III. Method					
1. Clarity of research design	1	2	3	4	5
2. Originality including justification for departures from or agreement with traditional research design	1	2	3	4	5
3. Appropriateness of methods used (operationalization of variables, sample, research setting, timeline, attention to ethical research practices etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
IV. Results					
1. Appropriateness of statistics employed	1	2	3	4	5
2. Adequacy of statistical analyses	1	2	3	4	5
3. Clarity of results presentation	1	2	3	4	5

V. Discussion					
1. Interpretation of statistical results	1	2	3	4	5
2. Description of how results fit with other research findings	1	2	3	4	5
3. Consideration of study limitations, alternative explanations and identification of improvements in design	1	2	3	4	5
4. Extent to which the research makes a contribution to the empirical literature	1	2	3	4	5
VI. Formal					
1. Overall clarity of ideas expressed	1	2	3	4	5
2. Synthesis, organization, and integration of material	1	2	3	4	5
3. Sources adequate, current and/or primary	1	2	3	4	5
4. Overall exposition (conformity to APA style, sufficient conciseness of expression, spelling, grammar, punctuation, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
TOTAL (100 points)					

Experimental Psychology Program  
Graduate Student Evaluation Form

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Evaluation: \_\_\_\_\_

Based upon the faculty's discussion you were rated in each of the following dimensions.  
(Inadequate: Not meeting expectations, not progressing; Adequate: Meeting expectations,  
making sufficient progress; Exceptional: Exceeding expectations, exceptional progress).

	<b>Inadequate</b>	<b>Adequate</b>	<b>Exceptional</b>
<b>Academic Quality</b>			
<b>Academic Progress</b>			
<b>Research Quality</b>			
<b>Research Progress</b>			
<b>Professional Skill Acquisition</b>			
<b>Personal and Professional Development</b>			
<b>Fulfillment of Assistantship Duties (if applicable)</b>			

Comments:

---

---

---

---

---

---

Signatures:

Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

***Experimental Psychology***  
***ANNUAL STUDENT ACTIVITY REPORT***

Student name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Student advisor: \_\_\_\_\_  
Year entered program: \_\_\_\_\_  
Academic Year for this report: \_\_\_\_\_

**Instructions:** This form is designed for several purposes. First, it will provide the faculty with self-report information regarding your activities, progress, and future plans in the program. Second, this form will provide a record of your accomplishments, achievements, and activities in the program for subsequent use in applying for jobs, postdocs, etc. Because the academic year technically begins with the summer term, please include information for last summer (even when not specifically requested in the question), particularly if you did not already include it in last year's activity report. You also may include information about the upcoming summer when available (in fact, certain questions specifically request such information). However, when reporting information for a summer term, please indicate clearly the particular summer to which you are referring.

**COURSEWORK**

1. *Please list coursework completed/currently enrolled in for this academic year, along with your grades.*

Fall courses	Grade	Spring courses

Summer courses (if any; no need to include thesis/dissertation hours or PSY 584):

\_\_\_\_\_

2. *Indicate below any missing grades (NR) or incomplete grades (I) that may be on your record, as well as plans or needs for changing these grades (be sure to check Banner for this information).*

## RESEARCH

1. *Describe your current progress with the research requirements of the program (i.e., thesis, dissertation). Provide expected timelines for completion of the major components of your thesis or dissertation (e.g., proposal meeting, IRB approval, data collection, data analysis, written draft, final written version, committee approval, oral defense).*
2. *Describe any additional research projects on which you have worked this year. Indicate your contributions to the projects. What is the current status of the research project (i.e., has it led to a manuscript being prepared, submitted, or accepted)?*
3. *List below all presentations at professional meetings and conferences (use APA style) for the current academic year (please include any presentations to occur over the rest of the academic year, including summer—if known).*
4. *List below all manuscripts submitted for publication this academic year, indicating the journal to which it was submitted and the results of editorial review (use APA style).*

5. *List below all articles accepted for publication or published (use APA style) this academic year.*

#### TEACHING

1. *List any activities related to teaching (e.g., teaching assistant, instructor) during the last academic year. Include the course name, semester taught, enrollment, and your responsibilities.*
2. *Describe any specialized training in teaching. Have you completed or do you plan on completing the Certificate Program in Teaching from the SLU Center for Teaching Excellence?*

#### PROFESSIONAL

1. *List all professional organizations of which you are a student member, including any offices held.*

2. *Describe any professional service and/or leadership positions associated with the university, graduate school, department or program. Indicate your title and dates of service.*
  
3. *Indicate any other contributions to the profession or community.*

#### AWARDS, HONORS, ACHIEVEMENTS

1. *List any awards, honors and achievements you have received this academic year.*

#### ASSISTANTSHIP(S) OR OTHER FUNDING

1. *Were you funded by an internal (i.e., psychology department, experimental program, neuroscience) assistantship this year?*
  
2. *If so, please briefly describe your duties associated with this assistantship, and indicate whether it was a 20-hour (full RA or GA) or 10-hour (half-GA) position.*
  
3. *If you did not receive an internal assistantship this year, what other sources of funding did you receive (e.g., assistantship from another department or program, adjunct teaching at SLU or elsewhere, fellowship, faculty grant, student loans)?*

### **DOCTORAL EXAMS**

1. *Did you take your written preliminary exam this academic year? If so, when was it begun (Fall or Spring semester) and what was the date of final passing (if any)?*
  
2. *Did you complete your doctoral oral exam this academic year? If so, what was the date and outcome?*

### **For those who will not be in the program next year**

1. *Why will you not be in the program next year (e.g., will have received Ph.D., have decided to take a leave of absence or leave program without degree)?*
  
2. *What position will you hold next year (if known)?*
  
3. *Please provide as much future contact information as possible (e.g., mailing address, email address, phone number)?*



## **Experimental Program Preliminary Exam Requirements**

### Function/Purpose

The purpose of the written preliminary qualifying exam, taken after the Master's thesis work has been completed and accepted (typically during the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the program), is to demonstrate competency in three primary areas:

1. Comprehensive knowledge of declared concentration area (Cognition & Neurosciences, Developmental Psychology, or Social Psychology)
2. Fluency in program core areas of Developmental Psychology, Social Psychology, Cognitive Psychology, and Neuroscience, as relevant
3. The ability to critically evaluate a core knowledge base

### Format

The required format for the preliminary exam is a critical review paper, of publishable quality, like those seen in *Psychological Bulletin* or *Psychological Review*. That is, the exam's content should reflect more than a simple descriptive literature review; it should present a reasoned point of view, propose a model, attempt to resolve a theoretical dispute, provide a unique integration of material, etc. In doing so, the paper must address the following issues, in a meaningful way:

1. Comprehensive knowledge of a chosen area of concentration, as reflected in choice of paper topic.
2. Research methodology; when relevant, this should include discussion of specific ethical issues tied to chosen topic.
3. Diversity of perspectives, including discussion of alternative approaches to problem being addressed; when relevant, this discussion can include the discussion of issues regarding human diversity.
4. Discussion of issues from outside area of concentration that have relevancy to review paper topic.
5. Historical context of problem area addressed in review paper.

### Exam Committee

The exam committee is comprised of 3 faculty members within the Experimental Program—2 of which must come from the student's concentration area. Exceptions for faculty members outside the program to serve on this committee may be granted through petition in writing from the student and his/her advisor to the Experimental Program Director.

---

### Time Frame and Guidelines

Preliminary exams generally are to be taken in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year. If a student has completed all Master's thesis work by the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year, then the Preliminary Exam is typically completed during the Fall of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year. If the student does not complete his or her thesis work until the Fall semester of Year 3, then the Preliminary Exam may not be attempted until the Spring semester of that academic year. In either case, the first step is to develop a Preliminary Exam Proposal, including a narrative overview/summary of the goals of the paper, followed by an annotated outline describing the major topics to be covered and how they address the criteria listed above, with estimated page numbers and sample references for each major section. Students should work with their mentor in developing this proposal, which typically is between 3 and 7 pages in length. The completed proposal should be submitted to the Preliminary Exam Committee at least one week before a scheduled meeting of the student and committee to discuss the proposal. Bring a copy of the Preliminary Exam Agreement/Outcome form to the proposal meeting. The committee may request changes to the proposal before approving it, so this meeting should be scheduled *before* the end of the Prelim Proposal Approval Period (see below). Because it may be difficult to find times when the entire committee is available, students also are advised to begin scheduling this meeting well in advance. The exam is due no later than 8 weeks following the approval date. Failure to turn in a completed exam by this date will result in a grade of "reject" (described below). Note: if any of the following calendar dates occur on a non-business day, they will be replaced with the next business day. Exceptions to this timeline may be made under extreme circumstances; the entire committee must agree in writing to any alterations in the timeline.

#### **Preliminary Exam Calendar—Fall semester exams**

<b>Aug. 15-Sept. 1</b>	Fall Prelim Proposal Approval Period -- committee approval of preliminary exam proposal, with possible amendments, must occur during this period
<b>8 weeks after proposal approval date</b>	Fall preliminary exam due date.
<b>December 8</b>	Final date for Exam Committee Chair to receive evaluation feedback from committee members
<b>December 15</b>	Date by which student receives committee evaluation. Student is allowed 4 weeks from the actual date evaluation received to complete revisions for exams receiving "accepted pending minor revisions" or "revise and resubmit" evaluations. Student notified of final evaluation of exam within 2 weeks of committee's receipt of revised exam.

### **Preliminary Exam Calendar—Spring semester exams**

<b>Jan. 15 – Feb. 1</b>	Fall Prelim Proposal Approval Period -- committee approval of preliminary exam proposal, with possible amendments, must occur during this period
<b>8 weeks after proposal approval date</b>	Spring preliminary exam due date
<b>May 8</b>	Final date for Exam Committee Chair to receive evaluation feedback from committee members
<b>May 15</b>	Date by which student receives committee evaluation. Student is allowed 4 weeks from the actual date evaluation is received to complete revisions for exams receiving “accepted pending minor revisions” or “revise and resubmit” evaluations. Student notified of final evaluation of exam within 2 weeks of committee’s receipt of revised exam.

## Evaluation

Preliminary exams may be given one of four grades. These are described below. Members of the preliminary exam committee will convey their general feedback regarding the preliminary exam in writing to the chair of the committee no later than the deadlines listed above. The chair will then convey this information in writing to the student, along with the committee's grade of the exam (reached by consensus). The student will then be responsible for meeting with the individual committee members to obtain clarification and specifics regarding their feedback. The grades are:

1. *Accepted, no revisions required.*
2. *Accepted pending minor revisions.* Revisions must be completed within 4 weeks of notification of the grade.
3. *Revise and resubmit exam.* Only one revision is allowed in order to become accepted, and should be completed within 4 weeks of notification of the grade, or an alternative time frame as determined by the preliminary exam committee.
4. *Rejected.* A new preliminary exam may be attempted in the semester following that in which the first preliminary exam was attempted, but only one more attempt is allowed. If this second exam also receives a grade of *reject*, then the student will no longer be allowed to continue in the program.

Upon successful completion of the written preliminary exam, the chair of the exam committee will notify the program director, who will convey this information by letter to the Associate Vice President for Graduate Education in care of the Doctoral Candidacy Advisor. At this point the student should begin preparation for the oral qualifying exam. **Check the Graduate Education web site for appropriate forms and guidelines related to the Doctoral Oral exam.**

## Other Preliminary Exam Rules and Policies

1. Because this is an exam, no feedback or discussions concerning exam-related material (i.e., no external help) are allowed once the exam has begun, whether from committee members, peers, or other outside sources (e.g., the writing center). Although the student may seek general assistance during the exam period with skills that may be useful for the exam (e.g., general writing skills), there should be no feedback given on drafts of the exam itself or on content directly related to the exam.
2. As a rule of thumb, most written preliminary exams are approximately 40-50 pages of text in length (APA format).

## Doctoral Oral Qualifying Exam

The Graduate Education office requires that all students in a doctoral program take an oral qualifying exam prior to the formalized research-phase of their doctoral study. This exam is intended to evaluate broad knowledge of the field, and to serve as an assessment of the student's ability to integrate knowledge across the discipline. Applied to the Graduate Program in Experimental Psychology, the purpose of the oral exam is for the student to provide evidence to the faculty that he/she is competent both in general knowledge of psychology, and in his/her area of expertise. As such, the oral exam specifically will assess the following competencies:

1. Knowledge of key fundamental concepts in general psychology
2. The ability to integrate knowledge from diverse areas within psychology
3. The ability to express expert knowledge within chosen concentration area

### Oral Exam Committee

The oral exam committee is comprised of at least 4 faculty members, at least two from within and at least one from outside of the student's concentration area, approved by the department chair. The Chairperson of this committee is the student's major advisor.

### Scheduling the Exam

**See the Graduate Education web page for the appropriate forms used to schedule the doctoral oral exam.** These forms must be on file in the Graduate Education Doctoral Candidacy Advisor's office at least 3 weeks prior to the scheduled exam date. Once these forms are on file, ballots (see below) will be sent by the Doctoral Candidacy Advisor's office to the committee chairperson, who will bring the ballots to the examination.

### Oral Exam Format

The specific content of the oral exam, as enumerated above, will be assessed through a professional conversational format, rather than a strict interrogatory format. Students begin the conversation with a 10-15 minute overview of their research interests (e.g., what have you done, where are you now, and where do you see your research interests going in the future?), without audio/visual materials. This overview is meant to serve as the springboard from which the committee can begin to ask questions to assess the student's breadth and depth of knowledge within psychology, so it is not meant to be the sole focus of the exam. Students should not bring their own notes to the exam. It is the Chairperson's responsibility to make sure that a fair amount of time and attention is devoted to assessment of both the student's general and expert knowledge within psychology. It is also the Chairperson's responsibility to make sure that all committee members have the opportunity to ask questions of the student, but it is not necessary that each committee member be given a designated turn for a designated amount of time. The specific format should be agreed upon by the committee prior to the exam,

but it is typically structured to reflect the types of interactions one may have during an individual academic job interview, where the student/applicant is first asked to “tell me about yourself”, and then addresses questions from individuals representing diverse perspectives. ***The duration of the exam is at least 60 minutes and is not to exceed 90 minutes.***

### Oral Exam Evaluation

At the end of the examination, the student is dismissed and the members of the examination committee independently complete confidential ballots evaluating the student’s performance. After the ballots are sealed, the committee discusses the results so that they can be communicated informally to the student. The sealed ballots are then delivered to the Associate Vice President for Graduate Education in care of the Doctoral Candidacy Advisor. The Associate Vice President for Graduate Education formally communicates the outcome of the examination in writing to the student.

According to university policy, “a student receiving two or more unfavorable evaluations fails the examination. Upon authorization of the Associate Vice President for Graduate Education, the oral examination may repeat once. Ordinarily, the second attempt should not be scheduled within the same academic term as the first. The committee that administered the first exam will also administer the second examination under ordinary circumstances. The major-field chairperson will submit a written request for a second examination to the Associate Vice President for Graduate Education well in advance of the desired date of that exam. Should the outcome of the second examination be unsatisfactory, a third exam is rarely approved, and is considered by the Associate Vice President for Graduate Education upon the unanimous recommendation of the examining committee.”

### Tips for Preparing for and Taking the Doctoral Oral Exam

1. The exam is modeled after an individual academic job interview format, where you are often asked to “tell me about yourself” (i.e., your research) and then have a conversation with and address questions from individuals who may represent diverse areas of psychology. As such, it is a test of whether you can engage in professional conversations with people from various sub-disciplines of psychology. The goal is to show that you can “think on your feet” as a professional. You may not know “the answer” but, of more importance in evaluating your exam performance is whether you can reason professionally (i.e., in a theory-based or evidence-based manner).
2. To prepare for the exam, then, there is not a set list of facts you should learn or articles you should read. You may want to review notes or readings from courses you’ve taken across the various concentrations in our program (cognitive neuroscience, developmental, social), thinking about how that coursework or those topics may relate to your own area of research interest and expertise (as reflected in your thesis, preliminary exam topic, and/or dissertation plans). Think particularly about the areas of expertise represented in your committee and what sorts of questions committee members may have, given their differing backgrounds. Think about how questions may reflect the various elements of your preliminary exam (ethics, diversity, history, methodology) or might arise from your thesis topic/results or your dissertation topic/proposal. You may want to check with individual committee members about whether they’d like to meet with you before the exam, but such a meeting is not required.
3. Because the exam is designed to assess both general and expert knowledge within psychology, you should be able to do more than discuss your own area of expertise, however. You should be able to display comprehensive knowledge of your own broad concentration area (i.e., cognitive neuroscience, developmental, or social), including (among other things) major theories and names of theorists associated with them. In other words, you should be familiar with the sorts of information that would appear in an introductory text for your concentration, whether or not it reflects your own specific area of research expertise. You also should be able to relate your own research expertise to other areas of psychology (i.e., to integrate ideas across concentrations) or to areas outside of the program or department if relevant.
4. Other pointers:
  - a. If you don’t understand a question, ask for clarification.
  - b. It is fine (in fact, it may be desirable) to pause and think things through before answering a question.
  - c. Please do not provide snacks (food, beverages) for the committee.