

Behavioural and Cognitive Neuroscience Area  
Guidelines for Graduate Students in the Psychology Graduate Program

Revised March 2010

The following guidelines are for Psychology graduate students in the BCN area, and supplement the Graduate Handbook for the Psychology program.

**MSc Degree**

Course Requirements

The grad program requires 4 half courses: Psychology 9540 (Research Design) and 2 additional substantive half courses.

Participation in the Research Seminar in Behavioural and Cognitive Neuroscience is required in each year, but this course does not count towards one of the required courses.

Courses from outside the department may count towards required courses with approval of the advisor and area.

Advisory Committee

Faculty in the area will serve as the advisory committee for MSc students and will generally meet during and following the Research Seminar to evaluate research progress and progress in the program. In addition, students may request meetings and advice more frequently. Students should present a proposal of their thesis research, including preliminary data, at the Research Seminar during their first year in the program (MSc1). Students should present the near-completed thesis research at the Research Seminar during their second year in the program (MSc2).

Completion of the MSc program typically takes 2 years. It is possible to do so sooner, however.

Typical MSc Program:

Year	Research	Courses
MSc 1	determine thesis research topic with advisor design and begin research propose research at Research Seminar	Psychology 9540 (Research Design) Psychology 71Xy (Research Seminar)
MSc 2	finish data collection and analysis present thesis research at Research Seminar thesis defense	Psychology 71Xy (Research Seminar) 2 other half course

## **PhD Degree**

### Course Requirements

In addition to the requirements for the master's degree, a student must take the equivalent of two full graduate courses or four half courses in the PhD1 and 2 years, with at least one full course or two half courses taken in the PhD1 year. If Psychology 9540 Research Design, or its equivalent, has not been taken at the Master's level, it must be taken in the PhD1 year.

Participation in the Research Seminar in Behavioural and Cognitive Neuroscience is required in each year, but this course does not count towards one of the required half courses (typically in PhD1).

### Comprehensive Examination

The comprehensive examination should be undertaken within the first 12 months of registration in the PhD program. The scope and subject area of the comprehensive examination are suggested by the student and supervisor. In general, three areas of Behavioural and Cognitive Neuroscience, broadly defined, are covered with a proposed examiner for each topic. The topics should be specified in sufficient detail appropriate for the PhD level. These topics are submitted to the Area for discussion and approval at an Area faculty meeting. Students should arrange to meet frequently with each examiner to discuss readings and areas which should be concentrated on for the examination.

The examination is administered by an examination committee consisting of a Chair appointed by the Area and three examiners. Members of the Advisory Committee, excluding the supervisor, and extra-departmental faculty may serve on the examination committee.

The examination consists of a written component and an oral component. The student is expected to be able to recall facts, recognize general concepts, use new information to solve novel problems, be aware of the historical development of the subdiscipline, and be familiar with the current research methods in his/her own related fields.

The oral component of the examination is normally taken approximately one week before the written component. The candidate is normally informed of the composition of the examining committee at least four weeks prior to the oral examination. The duration of the oral examination is usually about two hours. Only members of the examination committee can ask questions; other faculty can attend but do not participate. At the conclusion of the oral examination, the examinee leaves the room and then the chair invites discussion of the candidate's performance prior to calling for a vote. Pass or fail votes are collected by written ballot from members of the examination committee, with the majority opinion determining the result. The chair votes only in the event of a tie. At the conclusion of the examination, the chair verbally informs the student of the outcome and transmits any comments the examiners might suggest. The student is also provided with a letter from the chair of the examining committee stating the results of the examination and, where appropriate, comments on his/her performance.

The written examination consists of at least three principal questions prepared by the examination committee. The student will generally be given a choice within the principal questions. The examination will last four hours. Each question is graded by at least two faculty members. To pass the written component of the examination, an overall grade of "B" (70%) is required on each of the questions.

A student is permitted two attempts at the oral examination but only one attempt at the written component. If unsuccessful the student will meet with the Advisory Committee to determine a course of action, which normally would involve withdrawal from the graduate program.

Students, with their Advisor, should propose comprehensive exam topics and examiners to the area as soon as possible after beginning the PhD, ideally in September of PhD1. The Area should approve the topics and examiners by the end of October of PhD1. Students and examiners should develop reading lists shortly thereafter. At the latest, the examiners, topics and reading lists should all be in place by the end of the first term of PhD1. The exam itself should be completed by the end of the PhD1 year.

#### Advisory Committees

An Advisory Committee is established for each student by the BCN Area in consultation with the student and supervisor. The supervisor is the chair of the committee. At least two other members are chosen for their expertise in an area related to the proposed research topic. Appropriate experts from outside the Area may be included.

Within one month of entering the PhD program, students and their supervisors select two other faculty members to serve as an Advisory Committee. Each student meets with their Advisory Committee within the first two months of entering their program. The purpose of the first meeting is to introduce everyone, and to allow the Advisory Committee to become aware of the general project area, and to discuss future course work. It is not necessary to have the overall scope of the research project worked out at this stage. A one or two-page written report may help but is not required for the first meeting. Subsequently, each student meets with their Advisory Committee at approximately six-month intervals. These meetings may occur concurrent with the Research Seminar, but as research progresses in PhD2 and PhD3 years it is usually necessary to schedule meetings outside of Research Seminar. A written report (generally not greater than 10 double-spaced pages, plus figures representing data) can be distributed by the student to members of the Advisory Committee. The supervisor prepares a written report of each meeting which goes into the student's file; a copy is given to the Area Chair for signature and to the Graduate Program Coordinator.

Meetings can be convened by the student, the supervisor, or any member of the Advisory Committee. In addition to these formal meetings, members of the Advisory Committee can monitor the progress of the student by attending laboratory meetings at which students present reports on research. Advisory committee members should also attend presentations made by students in seminars.

### PhD Thesis Proposal

PhD students should complete (and have accepted) a PhD proposal no later than the end of their PhD2 year. Once the proposal is prepared, a formal PhD advisory committee meeting will be scheduled. Students should submit copies of their proposal (maximum 10 pages) to the committee at least two weeks before the proposal meeting is held. The committee may approve the proposal as written or may require that changes be made before the research can proceed. Further proposal meetings may be necessary before the proposal is formally approved. Following each proposal meeting, the supervisor will complete a report on the outcome of the meeting and return this to the Graduate Office.

# Sample Advisory Committee Report

## ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING REPORT

Candidate:

Date:

Advisory Committee:  
(\*in attendance)

Proposed Thesis Title:

**Course Work** Completed:  
In Progress:  
Proposed/remaining:  
Other (teaching, etc.):

**Research** Completed:  
In Progress:  
Proposed/remaining:

Assessment of progress:

Recommendation:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Supervisor    Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Student    Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Area Chair    Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Proposed Date of Next Meeting*