

Thesis Procedures

Psychology Graduate Program

Counseling Graduate Program

State University of New York at New Paltz

Students completing the M.A. in Psychology must complete a thesis, while a thesis is optional for those completing the M.S. in Mental Health Counseling or the M.S. in School Counseling. The primary purpose of the thesis is to allow a student to conduct a research project in a particular field of study. Either three or six credits may be awarded for a thesis. A literature review thesis will earn three credits; an empirical thesis will earn six credits. The stages of the thesis process are detailed below.

Choose a Topic and Thesis Adviser

- The first thing a student does is to identify a thesis topic and ask an appropriate full-time Department of Psychology faculty member to serve as a thesis adviser. Of course, familiarity with the faculty and their respective areas of research is critical in successfully navigating this task.
- Students should consider how their research interests match those of the faculty. The best theses usually derive from ongoing student-faculty collaborations, which generally predate beginning work on the thesis.
- Students need to balance choosing a topic that interests them and making sure that there is someone on the faculty knowledgeable enough about their topic area to competently advise them on it. Thus, in their first semester in the program, students should be getting to know different faculty members in anticipation of choosing a thesis topic and adviser.
- Once a student has asked a faculty member to serve as adviser, the faculty member has agreed to serve as adviser, and the student and faculty member have begun detailed discussions about the thesis project to be completed, the student is ready to:

Develop a Thesis Prospectus

- The student, with guidance from the thesis adviser, writes a Thesis Prospectus. The purpose of the Thesis Prospectus is to briefly summarize (2-5 pages plus a preliminary reference list) the proposed content and direction of the thesis. For those doing a literature review thesis, the Thesis Prospectus may be very similar to the later Thesis Proposal and may serve both purposes if deemed appropriate by the adviser.
- For a literature review thesis, the proposal should consist of a brief overview of the paper, the area of research it will review, the student's point of view on the research being reviewed, and a preliminary list of references to be cited in the thesis. For an empirical thesis, the proposal should consist of a brief overview of the problem to be studied, the methods planned for the study, the likely means of analyzing data, and a preliminary list of references to be cited in the thesis.
- When the adviser indicates to the student that the Thesis Prospectus is satisfactory, the student is ready to:

Initiate Appropriate Paperwork and Enroll in Thesis Credits

- The student enrolls in thesis credits after completing and submitting a Graduate Thesis Request Form. The Thesis Prospectus should be submitted along with the Graduate Thesis Request Form.
- Once this form is submitted, the student is ready to:

Assemble a Thesis Committee

- The Thesis Committee consists of the thesis adviser and two committee members (or “readers”).
- The student disseminates the Thesis Prospectus to potential readers.
- The potential readers should be given a minimum of 2 weeks to read over the Thesis Prospectus before being asked to agree to be readers.
- Criteria for selecting readers:
 - At least one reader must be a full-time Department of Psychology faculty member.
 - With approval from the thesis adviser, the second reader can be an affiliated psychology faculty member, from another department, or from another university.
 - Readers from other universities should only be selected when their specific expertise justifies their involvement. Their responsibilities to the thesis committee are the same as for any other reader. Ideally, they should attend all thesis-related meetings in person, but when this is not feasible arrangements should be made for them to participate by speakerphone in all such meetings. Like any other readers, they must approve the thesis proposal and final thesis.
- Once the student has found two potential readers who, after examining the Thesis Prospectus, agree to serve as Thesis Committee members, the student must:

Develop a Thesis Proposal

- The student, with guidance from the thesis adviser, writes a formal Thesis Proposal. For a literature review thesis, the proposal should consist of a brief overview of the paper, the area of research it will review, the student’s point of view on the research being reviewed, and a preliminary list of references to be cited in the thesis. For a literature review thesis, the proposal may be very similar to the Prospectus. For an empirical thesis, the proposal should consist of a full Introduction section (including review of the relevant theory and research, and specific study hypotheses), the methods planned for the study, the likely means of analyzing data, and a preliminary list of references to be cited in the thesis.
- Thesis Proposals have no set length. Literature review proposals are typically no more than 5-10 double-spaced pages in length and may be very similar to the Thesis Prospectus, while experimental proposals are often longer and outline the methodology and analyses to be employed.
- A Psychology Thesis Template (in Microsoft Word format) has been developed to assist students with the formatting of their theses. This template can be downloaded from the online version of the Graduate Handbook.
- The adviser must indicate to the student that the proposal is satisfactory before the student distributes the proposal to the rest of the committee.

Hold a Thesis Proposal Meeting

- Before the student proceeds with the thesis, the Thesis Proposal needs to be discussed by the student and the Thesis Committee in a formal Thesis Proposal Meeting, whose date and place will be arranged by the student with the help of the thesis adviser.
- Committee members should be given a minimum of 2 weeks to read over the thesis proposal before the Thesis Proposal Meeting.
- At the Thesis Proposal Meeting, the student briefly presents the thesis topic to the committee, whose members in turn give feedback to the student in order to facilitate the student’s progress on the thesis.
- The Thesis Proposal Meeting provides an opportunity for the student and Thesis Committee to discuss the project and plan for its successful completion. This planning

- includes discussion of how each committee member can assist the student as the thesis project unfolds; making sure the student and all committee members share an understanding of what each of their responsibilities will be is always helpful in insuring the thesis moves ahead smoothly and effectively.
- At the end of the proposal meeting, the Thesis Committee and student agree on a time frame for completion of the thesis.
 - Once all planning issues have been addressed, the student and Thesis Committee sign a Thesis Proposal Approval Form. Students attach a copy of the proposal to this form. Students also attach a tentative schedule for completing the thesis to this form, which is agreed to by the Thesis Committee.
 - The student submits the Thesis Proposal Approval Form and the attached proposal and schedule to the Psychology and Counseling Graduate Programs Office.
 - Once the Thesis Proposal Meeting is completed and the Thesis Proposal Approval Form submitted, the student is ready to:

Complete the Research / Write the thesis

- The student consults with the thesis adviser regularly on the progress of the thesis project.
- Successive drafts of the thesis should be submitted to the thesis adviser. Depending on the role the Thesis Committee members adopt at the Thesis Proposal Meeting, drafts may also be submitted to the Thesis Committee on an ongoing basis.
- Meetings between the student and committee members may also take place throughout the completion of the project, as needed.
- The thesis write-up should follow the library's guidelines in the General Instructions for Preparation, Format, and Submission of Theses to the Sojourner Truth Library. References should be cited in APA Style based on the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th ed., 2000).
- For an empirical thesis, the write-up must include a summary of the study (Abstract), the background and rationale for the study and its hypotheses (Introduction), the methodology used (Methods), the findings (Results), a discussion section (Discussion), and references (References).
- For a literature review thesis, the format of the write-up should be decided in consultation with one's thesis adviser.
- When the adviser believes the thesis is ready for final review by the Thesis Committee, the student distributes the "pre-orals draft" to committee members.
- After the readers finish reading the "pre-orals draft," the adviser consults with them to determine if all are in agreement that the thesis is ready to be defended. If there is not agreement, the adviser takes feedback from the readers back to the student and another revision is made; this process continues until all three committee members feel the thesis is ready to be defended.
- Once the student and the Thesis Committee concur that the thesis is ready to be defended, then the student ought to:

Schedule the Oral Defense of Thesis Meeting

- The Oral Defense of Thesis (i.e., for M.A. Psychology students, the required Oral Comprehensive Exam) provides an opportunity for the student and faculty to engage in a scholarly discussion of the student's thesis. It generally lasts about 60 to 90 minutes, though it may take longer. Thus, a two-hour block should be scheduled in case the meeting is longer than anticipated. Important points about the Oral Defense are as follows:
 - A copy of the most recent thesis draft needs to be provided to all Thesis Committee members well in advance. Students defending in the fall semester must submit the thesis to committee members by November 1. Students defending in the spring semester must submit the thesis to committee members

by April 1. Regardless of when during the semester the defense is scheduled, the student must provide a hard copy of the thesis draft to all committee members at least two weeks before the scheduled oral defense meeting.

- The student and Thesis Committee must attend the Oral Defense, but the student and adviser can agree to allow other members of the campus community to sit in on the meeting.
- During the Oral Defense, the student orally presents the thesis to the committee. There is no set time limit, but student presentations usually last somewhere between fifteen and twenty minutes.
- The student presentation is followed by discussion and questions from the committee.
- After all questions have been answered, the student is asked to leave and the committee discusses the student's performance. The Thesis Committee decides whether the student has passed the Oral Defense; agreement among committee members must be unanimous. Students can receive one of four grades:

1. **Pass:** the thesis is fine as is and no additional changes are necessary. Please note that this grade is rarely obtained, as there are typically at least some necessary revisions.
2. **Pass with Minor Revisions:** the thesis requires some minor changes, with the Thesis Committee entrusting the adviser to see that the student incorporates these changes into the manuscript; the committee members do not wish to review the manuscript again.
3. **Pass with Revisions:** the thesis requires significant changes; the student does not need to hold another oral defense meeting, but the readers wish to review the manuscript again before signing off on it.
4. **Fail:** the thesis requires both significant changes and another oral defense meeting; the thesis project reverts to the "Complete the Research / Write the Thesis" stage.

- A student can only defend the thesis twice. If a student fails the Oral Defense twice, the student is no longer eligible for their master's degree.
- After the committee evaluates the student's performance on the Oral Defense, the student is called back into the room and informed of the results by the thesis adviser.
- If the student has passed the Oral Defense with a "Pass" or "Pass with Minor Revisions," then the student has all committee members (1) sign the thesis signature page, and (2) sign the Electronic Thesis Approval Form. If the student has passed with a "Pass with Revisions," then the committee waits until appropriate changes have been made before signing the signature page and the Electronic Thesis Approval Form. If the student has failed the defense, then no signatures are given and the student and committee plan how to proceed. Please note that the signature page must be printed on 20% rag or cotton paper.
- If the student has received any of the three passing oral defense grades, then the thesis committee chair signs the Oral Defense of Thesis Results Form and within 24 hours submits one copy to the Graduate School (campus mail: HAB 804; fax: 257-3284) and the other copy to the Psychology and Counseling Graduate Programs Office.

Submission of Completed Thesis

- A copy of the thesis (including the signature page signed by all committee members) on paper made with a minimum of 20% cotton fiber must be submitted to the library, along with a \$25 check for the binding fee made payable to "SUNY New Paltz I.F.R.A. Account #900404-0920." The thesis should be delivered to the Collection Development Office (STL Main Floor, Room 36), which is open Monday through Friday

from 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.; the telephone number for this office is (845) 257-3731.

- A second copy of the thesis, identical to the first, must be submitted to the Psychology and Counseling Graduate Programs Office in JFT 316. This copy can be a photocopy of the first copy or an exact replica of the original reprinted from a computer. It can be printed on either 20% rag or cotton paper or plain white copy paper. An original or photocopied version of the signed signature page must be part of this second copy.
- It is the student's responsibility alone to make sure that copies of the thesis are delivered to the library and Psychology and Counseling Graduate Programs Office. It is not the responsibility of the Psychology Department or the thesis advisor to submit a student's thesis to the library and Psychology and Counseling Graduate Programs Office. It is expected that students will submit their theses themselves.
- M.A. in Psychology, M.S. in Mental Health Counseling, and M.S. in School Counseling students must also submit an electronic copy of their theses to the library. This allows students throughout the SUNY system (and potentially beyond) to access student theses for research purposes. Electronic submission of thesis requires that the student submit to the library a CD or DVD with the thesis on it, as well as a printed and signed copy of the Electronic Thesis Approval Form. Details about allowable file formats for electronic thesis submission are included in the Electronic Thesis Approval Form.
- Further details on library requirements for thesis submissions are available online at <http://lib.newpaltz.edu/policies/masters.html>.
- The student may now:

CELEBRATE!

Practical Issues

- Students who have registered for thesis credits but do not complete their theses by the end of the semester for which they registered should be assigned an "H" grade ("Hold") for the thesis until the thesis requirements have been met. Instructors should not assign final grades for theses until the Library has informed the department that the thesis submitted has been accepted.
- Graduate students who have finished their required coursework, who are not registering for any other credits, and who are using campus facilities (i.e., laboratories, studios, library, etc.) to complete their theses will be required to register for a 1-credit course. The 1-credit course, "Continued Registration" (PSY799), will permit students to obtain a valid student ID card enabling them access to needed facilities and equipment. Credits earned may not be counted toward degree requirements.
- Students who, for whatever reason, need to change thesis advisers in the middle of a thesis project need to consult with the director of their particular graduate program and, if necessary, the Department Chair. Sometimes a change in advisers will necessitate that a student changes thesis topics.
- Time limit: Students have five years from the date they matriculate to complete all requirements for their graduate degrees, including the thesis. Extensions will only be granted under the most extenuating circumstances.