

Psychology Thesis Stream

Important Information

Competition for the 2024-2025 Academic Year
Priority of consideration application deadline: April 26, 2024

Overview

Most undergraduate degree programs in psychology offer students formal opportunities to enhance their research skills and experience. The most common means of doing this is by completing a series of research and methods-focused courses and an undergraduate thesis. Besides providing a unique chance to work individually with a faculty member on an original research project, the completion of an undergraduate thesis is often an important step for students contemplating graduate school. Acceptance into the thesis option is determined by a competitive application process in the student's penultimate (that is, next-to-last) year of their program. This document provides an overview of the thesis stream and how to apply.

Requirements

"Thesis-stream" students will need to complete PSY 961 and PSY 971 as part of the 40 courses in their program. Students will complete the two required thesis courses (PSY 961: Thesis Project I and PSY 971: Thesis Project II) in their final year. Please note that successful completion of PSY 961 is required for entry into PSY 971.

Entry into the thesis option is granted on a competitive basis, so students should strive for the highest marks possible to be considered. Previous research experience is highly desirable, although not an absolute requirement. To provide some guidance on what is "competitive," note that the application requirement for Toronto Metropolitan's graduate program in Psychology is a minimum A- grade point average in the last two years of study. Other graduate programs have similar grade requirements. Since thesis students often go on to graduate school, they should aspire to similar grades. Entrance to the program is very competitive and it is rare that students with a CGPA less than a "B+" (3.33) are accepted. Completion of PSY 511 is mandatory to participate in the thesis stream.

Application Process

By the end of the second term of the penultimate year of their program (i.e., the end of the Winter semester of 3rd year for most students), students must apply to the department for permission to enroll in PSY 961. There are really two components to the process. The first is to find a suitable faculty supervisor in the weeks and months leading up to the application, and the second is to submit the completed application and associated documentation to the Undergraduate Program Administrator by the April deadline for priority consideration. The online application is on our program website.

Finding an Advisor

Students are responsible for finding a suitable and willing faculty supervisor for their work. This faculty member will be asked to formally confirm their agreement to supervise their student by

the April priority of consideration deadline, but students should devote significant time to meet with several different faculty members in the weeks leading up to the application date to find a suitable supervisor-student match.

Submitting the Application

Once you have found a faculty member who has agreed to be your supervisor, you will still need to formally apply to the department for entry into PSY961. Therefore, you will need to complete and submit the online application and attach a copy of your transcript (a print out from MyServiceHub is fine) to the Undergraduate Office by the deadline. Successful candidates will receive an official notice of acceptance by email early in the Spring/Summer term, and further enrollment information will be provided at that time.

Frequently Asked Questions

WHAT IS A THESIS?

An undergraduate thesis involves empirical research supervised by a faculty member. The description of the project, including the results and interpretation of the research, are ultimately described in a scholarly paper typically known as a “thesis”. For most students, this will be the first opportunity to do their own research from conception of the idea through data collection, analysis and presentation.

WHO SHOULD DO AN UNDERGRADUATE THESIS?

Completing a thesis is not the only way to explore psychological research at a deeper level, or to gain entrance into graduate school, but it is perhaps the most typical way. It gives students an opportunity to work closely with a faculty member on a project of mutual interest outside of a classroom setting. If you have a strong desire to do original research, including collecting and analyzing your own data, and you meet the entry requirements, you should consider this option. If you're at all thinking of graduate school, completing a thesis is strongly advised. Even if you're not thinking about graduate school, the thesis option can be a very rewarding and enriching experience- but it's not for everyone. Ask lots of questions before you apply.

HOW DOES COURSE REGISTRATION WORK?

If the thesis application is not due until April, how do I complete my course intentions a month earlier, in March? And how do I register myself in these courses in the Fall term?

When planning your Fall and Winter schedules, you should organize course intentions independent of PSY 961/971 (i.e., as if you were NOT accepted into the thesis stream). If and when you are accepted (likely early in the Spring/Summer term, a few weeks after application), you will work with the Program Administrator to make the necessary adjustments to your timetable.

The most common path involves dropping a previously selected course to make room for PSY 961/971. Remember, in the Fall, you won't be able to enroll yourself. Since the thesis courses require department consent, you can only be enrolled directly by the program administrator.

HOW/WHEN/WHERE CAN I FIND A SUPERVISOR?

It may take some time and thought to find a professor who is suitable and willing to supervise your work. You will first want to find out about the kind of work the various faculty members in psychology are doing. You can do this by reading faculty bios on the psychology department website. We also have an up-to-date list of supervisors on our website who are interested in interviewing students this year. Note that some of these potential supervisors may not have a faculty bio on our website (e.g., because they are adjunct faculty members whose primary appointment is at another institution). Please give these "external" supervisors your full consideration. You might also wish to speak with the Undergraduate Thesis Coordinator (Dr. Julia Spaniol) for some ideas. Finally, there are a few openings for students at different stages of their degree to do paid or volunteer research with professors in the department, and this research involvement can lead to thesis supervision opportunities later on. Even if you're in first or second year, you should think about the thesis as a long term plan and start making individual research connections with faculty members now.

Feel free to talk about your thesis interests with your professors -- in class, during office hours, or some other time. Although it may seem intimidating, remember that faculty members are typically delighted to have a chance to discuss their research with eager students, so go ahead and start that conversation. You should also think about attending a research talk / colloquium/ seminar in the department. These are held throughout the school year and this will give you a good idea what research really is and how it is communicated.

When you finally have a formal meeting with a potential advisor, most will -- at a minimum -- want to receive a curriculum vita (a "CV"; this is a resume that lists your academic experiences) and see a copy of your academic transcript. They will likely ask a number of questions about your research interests, work habits and long-term career goals. Be sure to think about these things in advance of your meeting. Again, faculty members will meet with several different potential thesis students from February through April, so don't expect an answer about acceptance right away. In fact, faculty members will likely NOT make a decision until very near the application deadline.

DO I NEED TO HAVE A RESEARCH PROJECT READY WHEN I MEET WITH POTENTIAL SUPERVISORS?

All you need at the interview stage is a general idea of the area in which you'd like to work. Developing the research idea/thesis is part of completing the thesis and will take weeks or months. Often supervisors will have some suggestions of studies that they are already working on for you to get involved with. In other cases, you can suggest some ideas that your supervisor will help you narrow down. With that said, try to spend some time in advance finding out what work the professor you're interviewing with does in order to prepare for the meeting with them.

WHAT HAPPENS IN THE THESIS COURSES? DO STUDENTS ATTEND CLASSES LIKE IN OTHER COURSES?

In the first term (PSY 961) there will be a few mandatory meetings of all the thesis students and the thesis coordinator, but most of the students' work will be independent. Early in the term, students will attend a series of presentations on general information required to complete the thesis (e.g., writing ethics proposals, APA style, etc.). A special information session will also be held on applying to graduate school. Students should be meeting with their faculty supervisors throughout the term (on a schedule determined between them), and should plan to spend several hours a week researching their topics and drafting their proposals. By the end of the term, students will present their research proposal in class, and submit a written copy. The written copy will be submitted to the advisor and the thesis coordinator (as second reader) who will jointly assign a grade.

The course syllabus will be available by September. In some cases, students will start work on their thesis in the summer before they enroll in PSY 961.

In the second term, PSY 971 students will (with faculty oversight and guidance) typically gather and analyze their own data, and finally write the thesis. There will not be regular class meetings throughout the term, but students will need to consult regularly with their supervisor as well as the thesis coordinator. The thesis will be presented as a poster on a special thesis poster presentation day at the end of the term. As is the case with PSY 961, the written copy of the thesis will be evaluated by both the advisor and the thesis coordinator.

IF I RECEIVE DEPARTMENTAL CONSENT TO ENROLL IN PSY961 THESIS I, WILL I AUTOMATICALLY BE ACCEPTED TO PSY971 THESIS II?

In the vast majority of cases, students who enroll in PSY 961 will move on to complete PSY 971. However, enrollment in PSY 971 is contingent on satisfactory completion of course requirements for PSY 961, including (but not limited to) receiving final approval for an ethics proposal, when applicable.

Additional Reading

Morgan, B.L., & Korschgen, A.J. (2014). *Majoring in psych? Career options for psychology undergraduates* (5th Ed). Toronto, ON: Pearson

Silvia, P.J., Delaney, P.F., & Marcovitch, S. (2016). *What psychology majors could (and should) be doing: A guide to research experience, professional skills, and your options after college* (2nd Ed). Washington, DC: APA.

More Information

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