Expectations Regarding Student Progress and Products

A Supplement to the Departmental Handbook

Prepared by the Social Area Faculty for Social Graduate Students

2010-2011

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to state explicitly what the Social Area expectations are for requirements, thesis and dissertation proposals and writeups, research involvement, and the qualifying exams.

***Some of this information is covered in other sources, such as the Departmental Handbook and the Graduate School Bulletin (available online at http://www.rgs.uky.edu/gs/bulletin/bullinfo.html). This handout is meant to clarify and supplement those sources, not replace them. Most important, the rules and requirements as stated in the Departmental Handbook remain the final authority, and any discrepancies between that source and what is written here should be resolved in favor of the Handbook*.**

A note on student responsibilities. It is ultimately your responsibility to keep appraised of important Department and Graduate School requirements, deadlines, and regulations.

Course Requirements

Social students are required to take the following courses: PSY 624 (the social proseminar); any two of the other proseminars offered by the Department (e.g., Developmental, Cognitive); PSY 610; PSY 611; and methods (described below). You are also expected to take any advanced statistics courses offered by the department and most advanced topical seminars in social psychology.

The methods requirement has been approached in various ways over the history of our area. Currently, the method requirement is satisfied by students signing up for three hours credit of PSY 780 (Problems in Psychology) in the fall and spring of their first year. The class is currently handled in a quasi-independent readings format. You will be handed a syllabus and reading packet to copy. You will then meet with the instructor roughly every two weeks to go over any questions they might have about the material. Your grade is based on exams given at the end of each semester.

In addition to these specific course requirements, you are expected to

fulfill an allied area requirement. The purpose of the allied area is to provide breadth in one's graduate study, and its structure is highly flexible and will vary widely across students depending on their interests and career goals. The allied area requirement can be fulfilled in one of two ways: (a) course work, consisting of six hours of related course work from other departments, or (b) involvement in research in another department, with such involvement lasting a minimum of one semester. You will determine the content and format of their allied area through consultation with your committee. An ancillary benefit of the allied area requirement is that it is a good way for you to identify potential outside members for your dissertation advisory committees.

It is expected that PSY 624, 610, 611, and 780 will be taken in your first year and that the other proseminars and the allied area will be completed prior to the qualifying exams.

It is important to note that with regard to course requirements (and all departmental requirements, for that matter), some flexibility is possible. Depending on particular student needs, a given requirement may or may not be reasonable and may in fact be waived. Students entering with a master's, for example, may petition their committees to transfer credit for certain course requirements (e.g., outside area proseminars). We have found, however, that transfer students nonetheless benefit from repeating the statistics sequence and PSY 624.

A final thought about course work: Beginning graduate students are often unduly anxious about their performance in classes. It can be difficult to make the transition from an undergraduate perspective, where classes and GPA were all-important, to a graduate perspective, where course work is a necessary but decidedly *less* important component (compared to research) of graduate work. It will be tempting to focus time and energies largely on course work, as the work load for these classes may seem at times overwhelming. We urge you not to yield to that temptation. Research should remain your top priority.

<u>Research Involvement</u>

As part of the social area requirements, you are expected to be involved in research each semester. This research involvement is usually reflected by the student enrolling in PSY 790 (Research in psychology), PSY 748 (Master's thesis research), or PSY 749 (Dissertation research). First year students will generally enroll in one credit hour of PSY 790 each semester, with more credit hours being taken in subsequent years when fewer other courses are being taken. At the conclusion of the semester, a grade for research hours is assigned by the student's primary advisor. The purpose of the research requirement is to provide you with extensive research experience throughout your graduate career and to

help you enhance their credentials. The bottom line is that your job search–be it for an academic, teaching, or industry position–will be sorely hampered if the only research you have done during your graduate career is your thesis and dissertation.

As noted earlier, one of the hardest aspects of graduate school is learning to make research your first priority. It is easy to be distracted by course work and teaching responsibilities, and those demands often involve immediate and immutable deadlines. Research is easy to put off, and it is tempting to do so when it seems as though there is not even enough time to devote to course work and teaching. However, we urge you to appreciate how fundamentally important it is to keep your main focus on research activities.

Early in the semester, either before classes start or during the first week, you should meet with your advisor. During this meeting you will discuss the research you have in progress and what goals you wish to set for the upcoming semester. These goals should be fairly specific, e.g., "finish data collection (85 subjects) for project X; analyze data for project Y; write method and results section for project Z." When you and your advisor reach agreement, these goals will be recorded in writing, and at the end of the semester your progress will be compared to those goals. An implication of this system is that the grades for your research hours will be as meaningful as grades for your other courses. In other words, the research hours will not be "automatic As" regardless of the amount of research actually done. You will not have to meet all of your goals to get an A (we want you to set lofty goals), but you will need to make reasonable progress toward them.

This system of establishing written goals for research each semester helps to emphasize the importance of meeting with your advisor on a regular basis. It has been our experience that regular, frequent meetings only help to get students on track with research; they never impede research progress. Thus we urge you to set up a regular meeting time with your advisor. More frequent meetings (e.g., weekly or biweekly) are especially important for beginning students, but advanced students need regular contact with their advisors as well. As you know, it is a graduate school rule that each student should meet with his or her committee at least once per semester. We believe that this rule has yielded very positive consequences. These meetings are traditionally held at the end of the semester (though they do not have to be) and involve the student reviewing his or her progress over the past semester and goals for the upcoming semester. It is the student's responsibility to schedule this meeting. For first year students who have not yet formed a committee, all of the social faculty are generally invited to these meetings. For students who have formed committees, the social faculty who are on the committee attend the end-of-the-semester meeting; non-social faculty members are generally informed of the meeting but not expected to

attend.

A related issue concerns the best use of your vacations and how much research you should attempt to do during summer and winter breaks. We acknowledge that the stresses of graduate school are indeed enormous, and we realize that time off is essential for your mental and physical health. However, we also realize that it is highly unlikely that you will be able to finish in a timely manner and build a marketable vita without taking full advantage of your vacation time. This places you in an awkward position: Usually we cannot guarantee you funding during the summer, yet we advise you to remain in Lexington and work as hard as you can on research. We acknowledge this dilemma without having any solutions for it, except to ponder that a few years of deprivation and loans are probably worth it if they enable you to obtain the job you want.

It is incredibly easy to have good intentions for your vacations but then somehow let time slip away. We suggest that all students meet with their advisors in the last week of the semester and work out a written set of research goals to be met during their time off; you should also meet regularly with your advisors throughout the summer to track your progress toward meeting your goals. Budget a week or so for fun and mental refreshment, but after that your interests may best be served devoting full time to research.

Other Area Activities

In a small area like ours, active participation by all students and faculty is of considerable importance. We believe that your graduate experience will be enhanced by taking advantage of all the scholarly opportunities that are available. For example, although the brown bag is not a distinct "course" for which you receive credit, we expect you to attend them. We also expect graduate students to present their research at least once every 2-4 semesters at the brown bag. Similarly, we expect you to attend departmental colloquia and encourage you to take part in departmental activities such as committee meetings and social gatherings. A visible presence in all aspects of departmental life is one of the best ways of attaining a well-rounded intellectual and social life. For that reason, we urge students to spend most of their working hours in Kastle Hall. Although you may be tempted to work mostly at home, where it is admittedly quieter, you miss out on valuable socialization experiences and intellectual exchange by doing so, and experience has shown us repeatedly that students who work at home are ultimately less productive and less likely to complete their Ph.D.

At some point you will be faced with the decision of whether or not to take full responsibility for a course. If your career goals include obtaining an academic position, teaching a course would be good preparation, and it could also enhance your credentials. In particular, if your goals focus on obtaining a

position at a smaller, liberal-arts college, gaining experience as the primary instructor of one or more courses will be essential. However, the time investment required in teaching a course is always greater than you anticipate, and if you decide to teach a course you must be careful not to neglect your research as a consequence. Having publications will matter more than extensive teaching experience for almost all academic positions, including primarily "teaching" colleges.

Theses and Dissertations

Project ideas. We anticipate that in most cases the idea for the master's thesis should develop from the primary advisor's research. For dissertations, the expectation is that the project should be largely independent, designed primarily by the student with little input from faculty. The goal for the master's thesis and dissertation and all other research projects is to end up with a publishable product in a peer-reviewed journal.

As experimental social psychologists, we have a bias toward experimental studies, but other formats (e.g. scale development, survey research, archival research, or observational studies) may sometimes be acceptable. Replication studies for a master's thesis may be acceptable in special cases, but only if they represent a methodological improvement and serve to extend--not merely duplicate--a given area. Replications are not acceptable for a dissertation.

Literature review. The introduction to a thesis or dissertation proposal should make explicit the problem being studied and its significance. A common problem with many proposals (and published articles!) is the "so what?" question. It is okay to make only a minor contribution to the literature, especially for theses, but you need to be able to articulate what that contribution is and to make a strong case for doing the study in the first place.

The literature review can be the hardest part of the proposal to write. It should be modeled after a JPSP article introduction, though perhaps more detailed. It should not be a long, exhaustive summary of every study ever published on topics directly or remotely related to the proposed study. An adequate literature review for any study can be done in 10-15 pages, though this should not be considered an absolute limit. Should a student feel the need to write a broad, comprehensive overview, it should be placed in a separate chapter.

The organization and thrust of the introduction is the most difficult writing task to master. A common mistake is to assemble a pile of relevant studies, write a paragraph summarizing the method and results for each of the studies, and then conclude the intro with a paragraph that starts off "The purpose of the proposed study is..." Instead, the introduction should be organized on a conceptual basis. What are the theoretical issues, and what empirical data exist on the issues? Your goal in the intro is to set up the theoretical framework for your study. Again, this means you will not be citing every study ever done, and there will be times when all you do is cite a reference in parentheses. That's okay. Your literature review should be critical in nature, a synthesis and integration of existing literature that allows you to establish and suggest ways of testing hypotheses. Your introduction should also include an explicit statement of the specific hypotheses being tested in your study.

Method section. The method section should be more detailed than those found in a typical journal article. It should include, either in the text or in appendices, copies of any measures (including standardized instruments) that will be administered and a full description of the entire procedure and all manipulations.

Your primary job in the method section is to convince your committee that your study is feasible and that it will work. To do this, you must make a case for all manipulations and measures included in the study. If you are using previously published, standardized instruments, all you need to do is include a paragraph for each measure documenting its reliability and validity, or showing that the measure has worked well in similar past research. If it is a new measure or manipulation, you need to convince the committee that it is a reliable and valid variable. This can be accomplished either by providing compelling evidence of the measure's face validity, or by collecting pilot data that the measure or manipulation is reliable and valid. The pilot testing does not have to be anything complex; simply trying the variable out on a small group (say, 10-20 students) should work in most cases.

The bottom line is that your proposal must substantiate the reliability and validity of every variable, either on the basis of support found in past research or through pilot testing. Although this may involve more work at the proposal stage, it will help to prevent the nightmare of nonsignificant results that can occur simply because of bad measures or manipulations. A non-obvious benefit of this requirement is that it will help you to keep the number of variables down to manageable levels. As Cohen persuasively argues, "small is beautiful" when it comes to picking independent and dependent variables. Keep your design as simple as it can be to test your hypothesis, and keep your number of dependent variables down.

One issue that has been problematic in past years concerns sample size. Your method section should address issues of power, and your design should call for a sample size which is large enough to ensure adequate power and which is large enough to accommodate inevitable subject mortality. You should present a non-arbitrary rationale for the sample size you choose, and your sample size should be sufficient for whatever analyses are planned. Lastly, it is not enough to merely propose a sufficient sample size. You must also collect the data. Obstacles happen in every project, and you may find yourself not running as many participants as you had originally intended. However, the proposal should be considered a contract between the student and the committee, and sample size is an important component of that contract. When you plan your study, you should make allowances for expected subject mortality, no-show rates, or subject pool shortages. If necessary you may have to extend your data collection an additional semester to get all the participants you need. Your committee will not allow you to defend a thesis or dissertation that involves a sample size appreciably lower than the one you proposed.

Analysis section. All proposals should include a detailed "Planned Analyses" section that specifies all the analyses the student intends to conduct on the data. This includes any preliminary analyses, such as manipulation checks or data reduction techniques such as factor analysis. It is not sufficient to say "The data will be analyzed via ANOVA and multiple regression." You need to specify exactly how many analyses will be done, what kind, what the independent variables are, what the dependent variables are, and what follow-up analyses (contrasts, etc.) will be done. The goal is not to foreclose the possibility of doing subsequent analyses should something unanticipated pop up in the data; rather, the analysis section should list all the necessary analyses and demonstrate that the student knows exactly how to proceed in analyzing the data.

An important function of the analysis section is to make clear the connection between the student's research hypotheses and the analyses undertaken to test those hypotheses. A good way to approach this, for example, is to present a table of predicted means. In other words, it is not enough to say "The data will be analyzed with a 2 x 2 x 2 ANOVA..." You should also be able to say, "if hypothesis 1 is correct, the main effect for Variable X should be significant, with Group 1 scoring significantly higher than Group 2" etc.

Writing, deadlines and meetings. The departmental handbook lists the various deadlines for proposals and defenses. Students should review those deadlines and plan their research accordingly, making sure to allow extra time for the stumbling blocks that inevitably ensue. Students should also recognize that an impending deadline will not alter the criteria by which a product is evaluated. There is a natural tendency, when confronted with deadline vs. quality tradeoffs, for deadlines to assume priority. Our philosophy is that meetings will not be held

unless the committee chair deems the proposal or manuscript ready; the existence of deadlines is irrelevant to that judgment. Again, the best approach for students to take is to start early and count on numerous delays in data collection and writing.

The transition to the writing process in academia can be difficult. As an undergraduate, your written products typically went through no more than one draft, and you rarely had to rewrite papers after receiving comments from an instructor. As an academic, the process is entirely different. None of us could write an acceptable product in a first draft, and our manuscripts go through an exhaustive review and revision process prior to publication. This is the perspective that students need to adopt; you should expect to have your advisor read and comment on multiple drafts of proposals or manuscripts before they are ready to hand out to other members of your committee. This means that you need to budget plenty of time for the writing phase.

Your advisor, of course, will comment on all drafts carefully and let you know when it is ready to circulate to other committee members. Committee members vary in how much input they wish to make in the early stages of proposal and thesis writing. Some faculty, especially the outside members, don't want anything to do with the project until the final version is ready, and then they won't read it until the night before the defense. Other committee members would like to be involved in the design and see early drafts. You will avoid complications by asking all of your committee members at the very beginning what level of involvement they desire in the process and then respecting their wishes.

The departmental handbook lists time frames for circulating theses and dissertations to the committee, DGS, and graduate school. These deadlines should not be ignored. The basic rule of thumb is to allow faculty members <u>two weeks</u> to look over any product. Many of the faculty will take much less time to read over your draft, but you will always be on the safe side if you allow two weeks per manuscript version. Students should also be aware that scheduling meetings during the summer can pose additional difficulties, and you should check with your committee members well in advance prior to making any plans that involve meetings during summer. You should also be aware that the graduate school requires theses and dissertations to be printed very precisely in a particular format (which is <u>not</u> APA style, to make things more difficult). Ensuring you have achieved the proper format can take a lot of time, effort, and cursing, but there is a "ruler lady" at the graduate school who will reject your work for any deviation, however trivial, from the requirements. Again, you need to budget ample time for preparing the final version of your thesis or dissertation.

In the past, problems have arisen when meetings were scheduled prior to

circulation of a final draft. Students would often want to schedule a time early because it is difficult to juggle everybody's schedules to find an open time. However, this meant that drafts were sometimes not circulated until a day or so before the meeting, and the drafts were often not as polished as they should have been. To prevent problems like these from happening, the social area's policy is that no proposal meetings or defenses will be scheduled (and this includes even scheduling "tentative" dates) until the committee chair says the draft is ready to go to the committee.

Everyone has different ways of approaching research, and you will not be able to please all the members of your committee totally. In cases where expectations or suggestions from various faculty members conflict, the committee chair almost always has the final say. Committee decisions are made on a majority rules basis, but most committee members go along with the chair's preference. As the student, your best approach would be to make every effort to accommodate all of your committee's suggestions and resolve conflicts through consultation with the chair.

All students are expected to provide their advisors with a bound copy of their dissertation in a timely manner following its completion.

Qualifying Examination

Preparation for quals. No other rite of passage strikes as much terror in the hearts of students as the qualifying exam (quals). We believe that with proper preparation, such anxiety is unnecessary and even counterproductive. Your preparation for quals begins as soon as you enter the program and take the proseminar and other advanced seminars in social psychology. You should begin intensive preparation for quals approximately 3 months prior to taking them. Your initial preparation should consist of mapping out a studying strategy, meeting with individual faculty members, and compiling a reading list. A packet of materials including past exams and suggested readings has been maintained, updated, and handed down by senior social students and is available for your reference. The recent Fiske & Taylor Social Cognition text, along with the Baumeister & Finkel Advanced Social Psychology text, are other important resources. The faculty of course will be happy to meet with you frequently to comment on your studying strategy and to give you suggestions.

Perhaps the most important source of guidance and support will or should be the graduate student culture. Our students have established a support network in the form of advice from advanced students and files of readings and past exam questions. It may be easier to add and delete readings from previous students' lists than to start from scratch on your own. Establishing a pool of "classic" articles could help ease the great photocopying expense associated

with studying for quals. Looking at past exams will also help you immeasurably in terms of getting an idea of the scope and breadth of the questions typically asked. In particular, we strongly recommend that you conduct at least one or two "dry runs" of answering past quals questions under exam conditions (e.g., adhering strictly to time limits). We will be more than glad to "grade" such practice questions and offer feedback on how to improve your answers.

<u>Formation of advisory committee</u>. As soon as possible after receiving the Master's degree (or, after being admitted to full graduate standing for students entering the program with a Master's Degree), you should select a dissertation director and form a doctoral advisory committee. This committee consists of the dissertation director, who serves as chairperson, two or three other members from the Department of Psychology, and at least one member from a supporting area or minor outside the Department - in all, no fewer than four members, of which at least 3 must be of full graduate faculty status (typically, this means having tenure). The composition of this committee should be determined *in collaboration* with your primary advisor, who is typically the dissertation director. One of the functions of the advisory committee is the administration of the qualifying exam. Potential committee members must be informed about the procedures for taking quals used by the Social Area. Our procedures for taking quals are somewhat different from some other areas, and it is important that potential committee members knows these differences before agreeing to be part of a committee.

<u>Timing and scheduling of qualifying exam</u>. With rare exception, students will sit for quals no later than September 15th of their third year. Any time after that date is considered late and requires a formal petition addressed to your advisory committee describing a compelling reason for a delay. Note that this time-frame is earlier than that required by the graduate school. Our rationale for having students take quals earlier than required is that this time-frame is more conducive for advancing students' research, as you will do most of your studying during summer rather than during the semester where it might adversely affect your data collection efforts. We also think it wise to adopt a mentality that you do not spend more than one summer studying for quals; that should be ample time to do well on the exam, and studying longer is not only unnecessary but also needlessly anxiety-provoking.

The written portion of quals may be scheduled to begin on either the Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday of a given week. The site for the written portion will be a room designated by the committee chair. It may contain a computer for typing out the answers but must be free of any books or notes. The written exam is closed book, no notes, and students are expected to write their answers completely independently with no consultation with other students or sources (e.g., internet).

Rescheduling. Except in the event of a major misfortune, illness, or trauma, quals cannot be rescheduled.

Format. The format of the written portion of the exam is 3 days of in-class, closed-book testing, with each day consisting of four questions. During each day there are two sets of three questions from which two must be selected to answer. There are 5 hours allotted for completing both sets: 1 hour for each of the questions and an additional hour to be used for outlining answers, bathroom breaks, or to devote to questions where extra time is needed. The five hours can be broken into two sections with a lunch break between; students are expected not to discuss the quals with others if such a lunch break is taken. Time limits will be strictly enforced, so please pace yourself accordingly.

Any content area in mainstream social psychology can be the focus of a question during the first two days. During the third day, the first set can be devoted to an optional special topic area of interest to you (e.g., attitudes, social comparison, expectancy etc.), and the second set focuses on methods and statistics. A special topic area is determined by the student in consultation with his or her advisor and often corresponds to an anticipated dissertation area. If you do not wish to specify a special topic area for quals, you would instead have the first set of questions on the third day focus on mainstream social psychology.

Most typically, the questions for the written portion will be submitted by social area members on your advisory committee. However, members of the committee outside the social area are also given the opportunity to submit questions and will often do so when the student's allied area overlaps a member's expertise and interests.

Advisory committee members will read the answers and, after consulting together, determine the quality of the work. Your chair will then meet with you and summarize this evaluation. You will schedule orals to occur between two and four weeks after the last day of the written exam. In setting the dates for both the written and oral portion of the exam, you should keep in mind University regulations regarding acceptable dates for when oral exams can be scheduled (e.g., they generally can be scheduled only during times when the university is officially in session).

The oral portion of the exam will consist of questions following up on the student's responses in the written portion as well as questions addressing content areas in social psychology not covered in the written portion. An official evaluation of the overall Quals performance occur at the end of the Orals meeting, and the Orals meeting will produce a binding and final decision from the Advisory Committee based on the quality of the written answers and your performance at the oral examination. At this time, the committee members will

sign the graduate school card used to report the outcome of the exam.

If you do not pass the exam, your committee members will discuss how you can go about studying for a retake of the exam (the graduate school allows only one retake). The committee may recommend remedial work, which can take the form of rewriting answers, writing papers, or even taking courses. In some cases, even if you pass, the committee may recommend remedial work as a way of addressing important gaps in your knowledge of social psychology that became apparent in the written and oral quals. It is important that you do not view remedial work as "punishment" if you are asked to complete it; the faculty regard it merely as an important step to assure that you will have the background necessary for a doctorate in social psychology.

Closing Thoughts

We hope this supplement has been helpful to you. Our goals are to inspire you to reach your highest potential and to fulfill our responsibility as faculty by giving you the best training possible. We believe this can best be accomplished by creating high expectations and setting high standards. As always we welcome your feedback on any of the issues described herein, and we are open to suggestions and innovations.

Our primary goal in the graduate program is to prepare students for teaching or research careers. We set high standards for our students, but we also have complete confidence in your ability to meet these standards. We believe that our expectations reflect what is necessary to succeed in today's competitive job market.