

## **Graduate Student Advisory Committee (GSAC) Guidelines** (Revised, February 2024)

### **Organization and Authority**

The Graduate Student Advisory Committee consists of three faculty members, one from each area. This committee is an extension of the responsibility and authority of the Director of Graduate Studies. The Chairperson of the Department, in consultation with the Director of Graduate Studies, will select the faculty representatives. The primary responsibilities of this committee are restricted to the academic standing of students progressing toward the master's degree. Problems involving unethical behavior, cheating, etc., represent problems beyond the scope of this committee, although students may appeal termination decisions arising from such problems to the committee. All decisions of the committee require a simple majority vote of the full committee, and each faculty member on the committee will have one vote; impasses will be resolved by the Director of Graduate Studies. The decisions of the committee are binding on all graduate training programs, subject only to: (1) veto by the Graduate Faculty of the Department (by a simple majority of those voting), or (2) joint veto by the Director of Graduate Studies and the Department Chairperson.

### **Student Progress**

During every year of graduate training, each student's progress will be discussed by all faculty members within the student's doctoral program area, either (a) Clinical, (b) Developmental, Social and Health (DSH) or (c) Cognitive Neuroscience. Each student will then receive written feedback reflecting their major assets and limitations and any other major points relevant to the student's standing in their program and progress toward the doctoral degree. This evaluative letter should be put in each student's file. Currently, the Graduate School does not require copies of this progress letters/evaluations. In addition to the written feedback, it would also be desirable for each faculty mentor to meet with each of their students individually to discuss the student's progress that year.

The Graduate Faculty of each program is required to define good progress toward completion of the doctoral degree. This information should be included in the program's Graduate Student Handbook, which should be easily accessible by all students. It is recommended that the consequences of lack of good progress are also included in the handbook.

### **Departmental Course Requirements**

The Department of Psychology identifies certain categories of requirements for all its graduate students, categories which have been approved by the faculty. These categories include: (a) psychological foundations—research design and statistics; (b) breadth in the discipline of psychology—these vary by program area, but are specified as a departmental requirement of two psychology proseminars outside the graduate student's area (the breadth requirement for students in the DSH area includes the general expectation that Developmental (PSY 625), Social (PSY 624), and/or Health (PSY 626) Psychology proseminars will be completed); and (c) courses which have been identified by program areas as required for students specializing in those programs. Approval and final authority for all three categories of requirements rest with the departmental faculty.

While the model underlying these kinds of requirements is one of proseminar courses taught at the University of Kentucky, the Department of Psychology does recognize alternative, equivalent procedures for satisfying the requirements outlined above. These alternatives are: (a) credit for prior graduate work and (b) course bypass examinations.

*Credit for previous work.*

An applicant to the Graduate Program of the Department of Psychology or an enrolled graduate student in the Department of Psychology may petition for exemption from one or more courses in any of the three categories of requirements, offering as a basis for this exemption work previously done in a recognized graduate program at another institution or in another program at the University of Kentucky. This petition for exemption should be presented to the graduate program in which the student intends to enroll or is enrolled.

It is the responsibility of the student to provide the graduate program area adequate material upon which to base the judgment about exemptions. This material should include (at minimum) the student's transcript and the syllabus for the course. Note that the student may be asked to provide other materials: any text used in the course, test materials, papers written by the student for the course, and notes taken during the course. It is the responsibility of the student to organize this material and present it to the Head of the Area in which the student is enrolled. The Head of the Area will contact the Department of Psychology faculty member who regularly teaches, or most recently taught, the course, and they will jointly determine if the student's prior course is an adequate substitute. Note that if a prior course is not taught in the Department of Psychology, a faculty member who teaches a similar course at UK will be contacted. If the course is an adequate substitute, this decision will be documented in the student's file.

### **Student Grades**

*Grade point average.* A student is automatically subject to dismissal from the program if their cumulative GPA falls below 3.0 after the equivalent of one year of graduate studies (i.e., 18 hours of graduate credit).

*"C" grades.* A student is subject to dismissal from the program if they accumulate two "Cs" in their academic work within the Department of Psychology. In addition, a student who receives a "C" in a required course must demonstrate proficiency at the "B" level by taking a bypass exam, retaking the course the next semester the course is offered, or through arrangements agreed to jointly by the student and instructor who issued the grade.

*Incomplete grades.* Students will automatically be prevented from registering for additional coursework under the following conditions: (a) an "I" grade is not completed one semester after it is issued or (b) a "C" in a required course is not cleared up the next semester the course is offered. As soon as any of these requirements are completed satisfactorily the student may continue registering for new work in their training program.

### **Progress Toward Master's Degree**

To complete the steps toward the Ph.D. in a reasonable amount of time, it is important that students complete the master's degree before the end of the students' third year. Departmental policy regarding financial support for students is an added reason for speedy completion of the master's degree. Any delay past the recommended guideline allows the

student less than two years to complete the major hurdles of qualifying exams and dissertation research if the student realistically expects to receive departmental financial support throughout their graduate career. Each step toward the master's must be noted in students' file. Progress toward the master's degree should be as follows:

<b>Semester</b>	<b>Target Milestone</b>	<b>If Milestone is Not Completed</b>
End of Semester 3 (Fall, Year 2)	Proposal, oral and written	Student and advisor may be asked to meet with GSAC to discuss the delay.
End of Semester 5 (Fall, Year 3)	Defense, oral and written	<p>Student and advisor contacted by GSAC.</p> <p>GSAC will meet with the student to ensure that they are on course for completing their master's degree by the end of the third year.</p> <p>Note that GSAC would meet separately with the student and their advisor whenever both have been requested to appear before GSAC.</p> <p>GSAC may require that the student not be allowed to register for classes until the defense is completed.</p>
Start of Semester 7 (Fall, Year 4)	Defense, oral and written	<p>GSAC will again meet with the student to set a timetable for the student to complete the degree.</p> <p>Student may be given an additional year to complete their master's thesis, but it could be longer based upon a petition or advisement of program-specific student advisory committee.</p> <p>GSAC will request that a letter outlining the specific timetable be drafted by the student's master's committee. Letter must state that failure to complete the timeline will lead to the student being subject to dismissal from the program.</p> <p>Once approved by GSAC, the letter will be signed by the master's committee members, the student, GSAC and the DGS.</p> <p>If the student does not complete their master's thesis by the timetable agreed upon, the student is subject to dismissal from the program.</p>

*Note that if the student in question's advisor is a member of GSAC, that GSAC member will not be involved in the GSAC decisions with respect to this student. Instead, the DGS or Department Chair will serve as a replacement on the GSAC for that student.*

Regarding the thesis defense itself, in the event of a failure, the thesis committee may recommend conditions under which the candidate may be re-examined, if re-examination is deemed appropriate. The minimum time between examinations is four months. A second examination must be taken within one year after the first examination. Should any vacancies on the master's committee occur between the two examinations, the Dean of the Graduate School shall appoint replacements. A third examination is not permitted, thus failure of two master's thesis defenses would lead to dismissal from the program.

*Appeals procedures.* Students may appeal any decision of the GSAC. Students have the option of having a student representative from their area involved in their appeal. All students receiving official recommendations from the GSAC will be informed of the appeals procedures available to them. Students appealing GSAC decisions should initially submit a written appeal outlining relevant arguments and extenuating circumstances involved in their appeal. Students are encouraged to submit appeals any time such information is relevant to committee decisions in their view. GSAC is responsible for keeping records reflecting the number of pro and con votes on all decisions as well as written appeals prepared by students.

Students may also appeal academic disputes to the University of Kentucky Ombud.

*Waiving the master's thesis requirement.* Students who have completed an empirical thesis on an appropriate topic at another institution may have the requirement for completion of a master's thesis in the U.K. Department of Psychology waived through the following process:

1. The student should notify, in writing, their assigned advisor as well as the head(s) of their program area that they desire to have the requirement for completion of a thesis in the graduate program in psychology waived.
2. To be eligible for this consideration, the thesis must have been formally accepted as completed at the outside institution, and written documentation to this effect must be provided. Students matriculating in the department who have not yet defended the thesis at the outside institution have one year from the start of classes in the graduate program at U.K. to exercise this option.
3. The thesis will be reviewed by the student's assigned advisor as well as one other faculty member chosen in consultation with the area head(s). These two reviewers will render an opinion, in writing, to the head(s) of the area regarding the acceptability of the outside thesis as a substitute for completion of a thesis at U.K. In the event of a disagreement between the two readers, the area head(s) will appoint a third reader as a "tie breaker".
4. If the readers of the thesis judge the thesis acceptable as a substitute for one completed in the graduate program at U.K., the area head(s) will write a letter to this effect to the Director of Graduate Studies as well as the Chair of GSAC with a copy placed in the student's file.
5. If the readers determine that the thesis is not acceptable as a substitute for a thesis completed at U.K., the area head must also notify the DGS and Chair of GSAC to this effect. In the case of this outcome, the student may be held to the usual deadlines for

completion of a thesis at the discretion of GSAC. GSAC will notify the student of its decision in this regard in a timely fashion.

6. Students who submit a thesis as a substitute, but have it rejected by the readers may appeal the decision to GSAC, which will have final discretion in the matter.