

Graduate Student Handbook

*Department of Psychology
University of Southern California
Academic Year 2021-2022
8/10/2021 --update*

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A. PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Graduate students are admitted to one of five specialty areas within the Psychology Department—Brain and Cognitive Science (David Lavond), Clinical Science (Steven Lopez), Developmental (Frank Manis), Quantitative Methods and Computational Psychology (Richard John), and Social (Steven Read). These areas are led by a designated faculty person, i.e., an AREA HEAD. Area heads for the current academic year 2021-22 are in ()'s above.

Currently, the doctoral graduate program is administered by the DEPARTMENT CHAIR (Antoine Bechara); the DIRECTOR OF GRADUATE STUDIES (JoAnn Farver), and the ACADEMIC PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR (Jennifer Vo). These individuals above are responsible for maintaining the program quality and carrying out the graduate admissions process. They monitor students' progress in the program, their funding, and they sign off on forms, approve petitions, provide required student evaluations, etc.

When students are admitted to the doctoral program they are assigned a faculty advisor who provides consultation on curriculum planning and most academic matters. Typically, students' academic advisors are also their research advisors. Incoming students should meet with this faculty advisor before the fall semester begins or as early as possible to plan their classes.

In some cases, students may have more than one faculty advisor according to the lab they have joined. We explicitly endorse having more than one faculty mentor if applicable to the student's interests, research plans, and training goals.

Also, if students' interests and/or relationships with their advisors change over time, students may select a new advisor and or join a different lab. Occasionally, students may select research advisors who are out of their area or even outside of the psychology department. In this case, we require students to also maintain a faculty advisor who is in their major area. Clinical students must consult with the Clinical Area Head to ensure that their new, intended research advisor is acceptable.

Students are generally expected to complete requirements as outlined in this Handbook and as specified in the Graduate School's requirements. This handbook outlines the policies, procedures, standards of the Department of Psychology and the Graduate School of the University of Southern California for students in the doctoral program. Doctoral graduate students are expected to be familiar with the material presented here, as well as the regulations of the Graduate School presented in more detail in the current **USC Catalogue 2021-2022** and the **Graduate Student Handbook** published by the Graduate School. **Please note not all policies and standards of the Graduate School are covered in this Handbook.** Thus, students must also be familiar with the regulations in the **USC Catalogue** and **the Graduate School's website**. Appropriate course selection and the general understanding of deadlines, filing of Graduate School forms etc., are the students' responsibility.

Please sign, date, and email the last page of this handbook to the DGS (Farver@usc.edu) to indicate that you have read and understand the contents of this handbook.

REQUIREMENTS AND DEADLINES FOR THE PHD DEGREE IN PSYCHOLOGY

B. Residence and Time Limits

1. To complete the PhD degree, the equivalent of three years of graduate status at USC or elsewhere is minimally required by the Graduate School. Students in Clinical Science must minimally spend three years full time on campus, plus one full year of internship at a departmentally approved facility.
2. At least 24 graduate units (exclusive of PSYC 794, dissertation) must be taken at USC.
3. All PhD candidates in Psychology are expected to be full-time students. The university registrar considers that six semester units constitute a minimum load for a full-time graduate student, 12 units are a normal load, and 16 units are a maximum load.
 - a. All first-year students are required to take at least eight semester units during each of their first three semesters to satisfy the Graduate School's screening procedure required for ALL students. This screening procedure is described below in Sections D and E. In addition to the required coursework, it is expected that students' time will be spent on research, a teaching assistantship, or a combination of these two.
 - b. If at any time individual circumstances lead students to consider carrying a reduced academic load (e.g., less than eight units for first three semesters), they are responsible for clearing this deviation from the regular procedure **IN ADVANCE**, with their advisor or guidance committee and the DGS.
4. *Leave of Absence*

There are several supported leaves that are available to students should the need arise. In most cases (there may be exceptions depending on the circumstances), some leaves allow for students to continue to receive their stipends and insurance, assuming the proper process has been followed. These include family leave for students who are expecting a child and illness/health related leaves. Please see the links on the graduate school website for information about these leaves and the process for obtaining them:

<https://loa.usc.edu/filing-for-leave/>

International students should also view this site:

<https://ois.usc.edu/students/maintainingstudentstatus/leaveofabsence/>

An academic leave of absence may be taken under exceptional circumstances and requires submitting a department petition the semester before the leave is to be taken. These are the steps:

- a. The petition should be addressed to the student's AREA HEAD and should describe the basis for the request, and when (if possible) the student expects to return.
- b. The petition should be endorsed and signed by the students' faculty advisor or chair of their guidance committee.
- c. Approval or rejection of requests is determined by the faculty of the students' area. If approved, the Area Head signs the request.

- d. Finally, the request is submitted to the DGS. Approval by the DGS indicates that the leave is formally granted by the department and the student can move forward with applying for it through the academic program administrator.

Students who do not return to enrolled status at the end of an approved period of leave are no longer considered to be pursuing an advanced degree. Further, students who fail to apply for a leave of absence or those who have been denied a leave but fail to remain continuously enrolled as defined by the Graduate School, will also be considered to be no longer pursuing an advanced degree. To be readmitted to the graduate program, students must officially apply for re-admission as specified in the Graduate School regulations.

- 5. The Graduate School requires that students complete the Ph.D. within eight years of the date they start of graduate work at USC. The Psychology Department expects the Ph.D. to be completed within five years for non-clinical students. Clinical students are expected to complete their degree within six years, including the year of internship. Any time taken away from the program due to an approved leave of absence does not count against the time expected to complete the program.
 - a. Extensions beyond eight years require submitting a petition to the DGS. These extensions are granted only for very compelling reasons. (This is an important reason why students are asked to gain prior approval for any reduced academic loads with their guidance committees and the DGS, and/or to request department approval of a leave of absence).
 - b. In the very rare case that permission is granted to extend the degree completion beyond eight years, under no circumstances will the time for completion be extended beyond 10 years from the date of the beginning of graduate work.

C. Course Requirements

Ph.D. Program Course Requirements for All Students	
60 Units Minimum to Degree	
36 Substantive Units (which include 24 Graduate PSYC Units)	
8 Units in Category A	16 Units in Category B & C (with a minimum of one course taken in each category)
Specialty Area Course Requirements (see Appendix I)	
Doctoral Dissertation Units: PSYC 794a and PSYC794b	

1. The equivalent of 60 semester units (including PSYC 794) is the minimum university requirement for the PhD degree.
2. All students must take a minimum of 36 substantive units, at least 24 of the 36 must be in the Department of Psychology. Research, thesis or dissertation courses (PSYC 590, 594, 790, 794) do not qualify as substantive units. Of the 36 substantive units:
 - a. A minimum of 8 units (two courses) must be taken in Category A (see below).
 - b. A minimum of 16 units (four courses) must be taken in Categories B and C, with at least one course from Category B and one course from Category C (see below).
3. There are 3 categories of courses that fulfill department core requirements. These are:

Category A. *Quantitative Methods and Computational Psychology*

500 An Overview of Quantitative Methods in Psychology (F)
 501 Classic and Modern Statistical Methods I (F)
 502 Classic and Modern Statistical Methods II (S)
 503 Regression and the General Linear Model (S)
 504 Research Design (S)
 520 Fundamentals of Psychological Measurement (F)
 524 Research Design in Developmental Psychology (I)
 571 Foundations of Statistical and Data Analytic Methods in Psychology (F)
 573 Bayesian Data Analysis (F)
 575 Multilevel Modeling (F)
 577 Analysis of Covariance Structures (S)
 616 Research Techniques for Non-Experimental Social Science (I)
 621 Seminar in Quantitative Psychology (S)
 622 Decision Analysis and Behavioral Decision Theory (I)
 625 Applied Machine Learning (F)

Category B. *Biological Bases of Behavior* (physiological psychology, comparative psychology, neuropsychology, sensation and perception, psycho-pharmacology, behavior genetics) and ***Cognitive-Affective Bases of Behavior*** (learning, thinking, motivation, problem-solving).

506 Learning and Cognition (I)
 518 Cognitive Modeling (S)
 540 Cognitive Neuroscience (F)
 544 Psychophysiology (I)
 545 Neuropsychology (I)
 547 Functional Neuroanatomy (F)
 551 Decision Neuroscience (I)
 555 Introduction to Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (F)
 576 Psycholinguistics (F)
 586 Advanced Psycholinguistics (S)
 676 Seminar in Psycholinguistics (I)

Category C. *Social Bases of Behavior* (social psychology, group processes, organizational and systems theory) and *Individual Differences* (personality theory, human development, abnormal psychology).

512 Seminar in Social Psychology (I)
514 Psychopathology (I)
515* Clinical Assessment (F)
533 Cognitive Development in Children (S)
534 Social and Emotional Development in Children (F)
595* Practicum in Clinical Psychology (F, S, SU)
612 Seminar in Advanced Social Psychology (F, S)
619* Psychological Intervention (S)
626 Computational Social Sciences (F)
660 Seminar in Clinical Psychology (F, S)
680 Seminar in Psychopathology (I)
695* Advanced Practicum in Clinical Psychology (F, S, SU)

*Courses marked with an asterisk may only be taken by students in the Clinical program. Courses are marked in parentheses when they are *typically* available.

F = Fall, S = Spring, SU = Summer, I = Irregular

4. Students in the Quantitative Methods and Computational Psychology (QMCP) area may substitute one additional statistics/research design course for one of the four courses required from Categories B and C, provided they have at least one course from Category B and one course from Category C.
5. In addition to the department-wide core requirements, each Area has other requirements and are provided in the appendices below.
6. Students from Areas other than Clinical, may take no more than two clinical courses (i.e., specifically PSYC 514 and PSYC 660) unless approved by the clinical faculty.
7. Students who have taken appropriate graduate-level courses outside the department may petition the DGS for a waiver for one or more of the core-course requirements.
8. Students may petition the DGS to apply PSYC 599 courses to fulfill Categories A, B, and C. Note however, eight is the maximum number of PSYC 599 units that can be applied toward the degree.
9. Students from any area (except QMCP) may apply for a Minor in Quantitative Methods and Computational Psychology. Students must successfully complete any five courses in the Category A course list and may substitute one of these five courses with another (3 or 4 unit) quantitative course that is taken outside Psychology. Once all 5 courses are taken, students can fill out the QMCP minor form to request the minor designation, and submit to the QMCP area head for approval and signature.

D. First-Year Screening Procedure (required of all doctoral students)

1. The Graduate School requires that all students are screened at the end of their first year and before they have completed more than 24 units at USC. This screening involves an evaluation of students' course work and their research performance
2. The Department of Psychology carries out the screening in the following way:
 - a. The course evaluation part is based on students' performance in the classes they have taken in the first two semesters at USC. Students must have taken a minimum of 16 units (four courses), with at least three designated as substantive courses listed in the categories above.
 - b. Each Area evaluates their students' research performance at the end of the first year. The research requirements are determined by each area (see section below). The Academic Program Administrator notifies Area Heads if their students have not met the 16 unit requirement, have a grade of B- or lower in any course, or they are not meeting the minimum GPA requirements. The Area Heads notify their individual students and DGS no later than August 15 of the summer following completion of the first academic year, about whether their students have met the first-year research requirement and their research performance is approved.
 - c. The outcome of the first-year screening process falls into one of three categories:
 - (1) clear pass (approved to continue in the program),
 - (2) approved to continue for a terminal M.A. degree (but not for the Ph.D.)
 - (3) dismissal from the graduate program.

To obtain a clear pass in the first-year screening, students must have made good progress in research (as judged by the faculty of their Area) and have earned a B (3.00) GPA with no more than one C in the courses taken during the first year. Students' cumulative GPA for the year is based on all courses taken.

If students do not meet the standards for a clear pass, they will have failed the first year screening. The faculty of the student's specialty Area then makes a recommendation to the department about whether the student should be approved to continue for a terminal M.A. degree or be dismissed from the program. This recommendation must be communicated in writing to the student, the Department Chair, and the DGS no later than August 15th of the summer following completion of the first academic year. All such cases will ultimately be decided by a vote of the Psychology faculty no later than the first faculty meeting in September.

In very rare cases, the department faculty may decide that extenuating circumstances obviate what would otherwise be a fail. All cases will ultimately be decided by a vote of the Psychology faculty to approve the exception. With a faculty vote, a student may be permitted to continue beyond the first year with a GPA below 3.00. It should be noted however, that the Graduate School requires that the minimum grade-point average for all graduate work attempted at the university must be 3.00 before a degree can be granted. Thus, a GPA that falls below a 3.00 during a given semester will be considered a strong indicator that the student is not in a position to succeed in the program. Nevertheless, in very rare extenuating circumstances, permission to

register following any semester in which the GPA has dropped below this level will require a petition from the student's research advisor. The DGS will meet with the research advisor, the student, and the Department Chair to determine whether the petition should be forwarded to the Graduate School for consideration. Students who transfer credits must achieve this minimum GPA both on all graduate residence units and on all combined residence units and units taken elsewhere for graduate credit.

E. Second Year Research Requirement

The Psychology Department has an additional internal screening procedure in year two that involves the judgment of students' research competence. During the first two years of graduate study at USC, each student works with faculty on a program of research that culminates in a written report. This report must be a Master's Thesis or a research report of comparable scope and quality. The student's performance in planning, conducting, and reporting the study provides the basis of the second-year screening.

- a. The second year project must be *approved* by the evaluation committee by the last day of classes in the fourth semester in residence.
- b. The following evaluations are used:
 - (1) Satisfactory for M.A. level and approved to proceed toward the Ph.D. Generally this rating indicates the research report has met the standard of "acceptable for publication" with reference to:
 - (a) conception and implementation of project
 - (b) quality of the report
 - (2) Satisfactory for M.A. level, but not approved to continue for Ph.D.
 - (3) Unsatisfactory for M.A. level
- c. The screening is administered by the student's committee which is typically composed of three faculty within the student's area; i.e., the area into which the student was accepted for graduate training. The committee reviews the paper and provides the evaluation.
- d. To pass the second year screening and to be permitted to proceed toward the Ph.D., the three committee members must approve the work. The department form for reporting the outcome of the screening and a final committee-approved copy of the research report must be provided to the Chair of the student's screening committee, and to the Academic Program Administrator prior to the last day of classes of the student's fourth semester.
- e. Course credit (PSYC 590) may be obtained for this research at the student's and advisor's option. However, students who wish to receive an MA degree after completing their second year project, must register for PSYC 594ab (rather than PSYC 590).
- f. A research project carried out at USC is required of all students, regardless of prior graduate work at another institution.

- g. A PDF of the completed sign-off sheets and the approved research papers presented in fulfilling this requirement must be submitted to the Academic Program Administrator by the deadline.
- h. Faculty evaluation of the student's second-year research project will be reported at the faculty meeting held during September of the student's third year.
- i. In the fall of their third year, students are required to present their second-year projects or another research project as part of the department poster session typically held after the first faculty meeting in the fall semester.
- j. *Second year project → Master's Degree*
There is *no* master's degree requirement in our department. Students can receive a Ph.D. in our department without receiving a master's degree. While all students are required to complete a second-year project, they are not required to obtain a MA degree. Students can however, submit their second year project for a MA degree.

To submit a second year project for a MA degree students should do the following:

At the end of the first year, set up an appointment with the Graduate Program Administrator Jennifer Vo (email: jennivo@usc.edu) to request the addition degree track of a Master of Arts in Psychology (POST 606). Students are required to take a year's worth of master's-specific credits in the form of PSYC 594a and 594b. It is common to take 594a in the fall of the second year, and 594b in the spring, but students can also take 594a in the spring and 594b over the summer after the second year, or petition to take them both in the summer. Students typically seek to be awarded their MA degree in the spring or summer of their second year. Also note, that one semester before the desired degree date, students should have their master's committee members complete the "Appointment of Committee" form. The form and guidelines on how to submit it can be found here: [USC Graduate School's Master's Thesis page](#).

MA degree students should also create a Thesis Center account where they submit their Appointment of Committee form and initiate automated emails to their committee members to have them sign off on the finalized version of their thesis. Use this link to [sign into the Thesis Center](#). Check the Thesis Center for the approval deadlines that correspond to spring and summer degrees.

F. Assisting in Teaching and Research

1. In addition to formal course work, the Department of Psychology considers experiences as research and teaching assistants to be invaluable parts of graduate students' training. Both are strongly encouraged for all students.
2. As a teaching assistant (TA), students are assigned to help faculty in the teaching of a semester-long course. This can involve teaching lab sections of a large lecture course; preparing, administering and grading examinations; holding office hours with students; etc.

- a. All students are required to enroll in PSYC 593: Practicum in Teaching Psychology taught by Dr. Frank Manis. The 2-unit class is offered each fall and usually meets on Fridays for about two hours. Students learn how to run sections, teaching tips, etc.
 - b. Students are also required to attend the graduate school's TA training offered prior to the beginning of the fall semester.
 - c. The Graduate school will not allow any student to TA without these mandated trainings.
3. As a research assistant, students gain invaluable experience in carrying out research projects, from conceptualization and research design, to implementation, analysis and write-up.

G. Warning Status and Termination

1. To be in good standing in the Ph.D. program, students at any level of training must maintain a 3.0 GPA in course work and carry no more than one incomplete (IN) on their record. Also, in progressing through the program, students must meet several deadlines (e.g., 24-unit first year screening, second year project, qualifying examination, and completion of the dissertation). In addition, students must behave in a manner that does not violate the ethical and professional standards of the American Psychological Association.
2. Students are considered to be on **warning status** if:
 - a. their GPA falls below 3.0 at any time;
 - b. they have more than one IN on their record at any time;
 - c. they did not pass the 24-unit screening process;
 - d. they have one grade of C or worse in any course;
 - e. their second year project report was not submitted and judged acceptable by the last day of classes of the fourth semester in residence;
 - f. they did not successfully complete the Ph.D. qualifying examination by the last day of classes of the seventh semester in residence
 - g. they did not complete the Ph.D. dissertation within the time specified by the Graduate School (i.e., eight years).
3. **Warning Status** formally begins with written notification to the student by the DGS or the Area Head. Written notification includes a statement of the reason, conditions, and duration of the warning status.
4. A student may return from **warning status** to good standing with each remedy corresponding to the list in F.2, above. The student must:
 - a. bring the GPA up to 3.0 within one semester;
 - b. replace the IN with at least a B (not a B-) or better within one semester;
 - c. meet the requirements of the **warning status** associated with the 24-unit screening as specified by their area faculty;
 - d. repeat the course, earning at least a B (not a B-) or better, within one year;
 - e. turn in the second year project and have it approved by the last of classes of the fifth semester of residence;

- f. take and pass the qualifying examination by the last day of classes of the eighth semester in residence;
- g. complete the dissertation within one semester.
5. Relation of the **warning status** to funding: Being on **warning status** may put students' funding at risk. Also, those with a **warning status** are generally not eligible for department research grants or travel awards.
6. Termination of graduate student status. Students will be dropped from the program for any of the following reasons:
 - a. failure to return from **warning status** to good standing as described above in F.4;
 - b. earning two grades of C or worse in courses in their course work.
 - c. acting in a manner which, in the opinion of the faculty (2/3 vote) violates the ethical and professional standards of the APA and for which a warning period is either inappropriate or impossible.
 - d. failure to return from leave of absence by the date specified.
7. Petition for re-admission. Students who have been dropped from the program may petition for re-admission if their petition is endorsed by a faculty member within their Area who is willing to take responsibility for chairing the students' guidance committee. The petition will be reviewed by and voted upon by the full-time faculty in the students' Area. Unanimous approval, with no abstentions is needed for re-admission.

H. Funding

1. The department endeavors to support as many students as possible and to match students with placements on the basis of their training needs. Students should not expect to be supported simply as a matter of course. For example, Graduate School fellowships require that students maintain full-time status and good standing in the program.
2. When providing financial support, students in good standing will be given priority over students on **warning status**. Individual Area faculty and the DGS determine the students' standing in the program when making decisions and also consider factors, such as the number of years the student has been in the program, whether the student has the qualifications to serve as a teaching assistant in a particular course, and how well the student has carried out previous assignments.
3. Unless service is needed by the department, the general principle is that support is not provided beyond the fifth year.
4. Students are typically admitted on two years of fellowship. The "Early Year" Fellowship is designed to free students up to complete their early graduate research projects, particularly the second year project. Although it is typically used during the first or second year at USC, it can be taken any time during Years 1-3 in the program.
5. The "Advanced Research" Fellowship is designed to free up students to fully engage in *dissertation-related activities*. For this reason, students are strongly encouraged to take the Advanced Research Fellowship during Year 4 or 5 of the program, but only when they (1) have completed the Qualifying Exam, and (2) are engaged in full-time research. Thus, if students are completing non-research externships or internships that exceed 10

hours per week, they are discouraged from using their Advanced Research Fellowship during that year. Advanced Research Fellowships are rarely approved beyond Year 7 of the program and must be petitioned with Dornsife/Graduate School.

6. We also discourage the splitting of the externships, internships, and fellowships, RAships, and TAs by semester across an academic year.

I. Course Registration for the Qualifying Examination

Once students have sufficient units for graduation, they are encouraged to enroll in GRSC 800 while preparing for their qualifying examination. One unit constitutes full time enrollment. GRSC 800 may be taken for three semesters if necessary.

J. Guidance Committee

1. After completing the second year project, students and their advisors should discuss future research directions. Together they should be thinking about the input students will need from other faculty (both inside or outside the department) to guide them in these research directions. These meetings/conversations should lead to the formation of the students' guidance committee to help in formulating their qualifying examination and dissertation proposal.
2. To form a guidance committee, students complete a form (see the Graduate School website: <http://graduateschool.usc.edu/>) with the signatures from faculty who agree to be on the committee. The form is turned into the Academic Program Administrator who collects the DGS and Dean's signatures, and submits it to the Graduate School for approval. The guidance committee should be approved about a year before the student takes the qualifying examination, but *no later than the last day of classes of the 6th semester*.
3. The guidance committee must have at least four faculty members from within the department and one member from outside the department.
 - a. At least two members of the committee must be from the students' Area and usually includes the chair of the guidance committee.
 - b. There must be at least one Psychology Department representative from an Area other outside the student's area.
 - c. The fourth member can be faculty members who are from the student's area, are from another area in psychology, have a joint appointment in psychology (see Appendix III), are from other USC departments, or are from other universities.

Committee members can also be faculty with Research, Teaching, Practice, and Clinical (RTPC) appointments, who are approved by the Chair of the guidance committee, and make sense for the student's study. If the fourth member is an RTPC faculty or from outside the Psychology Department, the student's advisor must approve.

- d. The fifth member of the committee is considered the "outside member." This individual must be a tenure-track full-time faculty member at USC, hold the rank of

- Assistant Professor or above, and be from a Ph.D. granting department other than Psychology. This member can have a joint appointment in Psychology provided as they are classified as “external” on the department’s joint appointment list (see Appendix III).
- e. At least three committee members should be tenure-track (TT) faculty with a primary appointment in the Psychology Department (See current core TT faculty list on the department website).
 - f. RTPC faculty of exceptional standing may serve as chairs of guidance committees in the Psychology Department with written request of the Department Chair and approval of the Graduate School Dean. To serve as chair of the guidance committee, the RTPC member must have a primary appointment in the Psychology Department and have a documented record of exceptional expertise and superior achievement in a field relevant to the student’s research project.
4. The Qualifying Examination process is different across areas. **At a minimum, however, the exam has two separate parts: the written and oral sections which MUST BE completed sequentially.** The Graduate School requirement states that the *written portion must be passed first and then the oral portion can be scheduled*. The written and oral parts cannot be completed simultaneously (i.e., back to back on the same day). See J. below for the content of each portion of the examination.
 5. Two forms must be submitted concerning the qualifying examination
 - a. Students must submit their Appointment of Committee (AoC) form to the Academic Program Administrator by the last day of classes of the sixth semester. The Academic Program Administrator obtains the Department Chair and Dornsife Dean’s signatures for approval. This form establishes the guidance committee. The AoC form is available on the department’s website (Appendix III) or at the Graduate School website: <http://graduateschool.usc.edu/>.
 - b. After passing the written portion of the qualifying examination (or Part I), students have 60 days to complete the oral portion of the exam (or Part II). Students and their committee chair must email the Academic Program Administrator the date the student passes the written portion (i.e., Part I) and provide the date the oral portion (i.e., Part II) of the qualifying exam is scheduled. The Academic Program Administrator then generates the PhD Qualifying Examination Form that the student must bring to the oral exam (i.e., Part II) for committee approval and signatures. This form must be returned to the Academic Program Administrator immediately after the Oral part of the qualifying examination.
 - c. For changes in the guidance committee membership, students must complete a Change of Committee (CoC) form and submit it to the Academic Program Administrator. This form is available on the Graduate School website or the Department’s website (Appendix III).
 6. If the student and guidance committee chair are not able to form a complete committee, or if a former committee member is no longer available to serve, the Department Chair

(with the advice of the Graduate Committee), will appoint faculty members to serve on the committee.

K. Qualifying Examination

1. The student and faculty advisor should begin planning for the qualifying examination following the completion of the second year project. To ensure completion of the doctoral degree in five years (six years for clinical students), the entire qualifying exam must be taken no later than at the *last day of classes of the seventh semester*.
2. Prior to taking the qualifying examination, students must have met all department requirements with regard to courses and screening and must have the endorsement of their guidance committees to take the exam
3. The qualifying examination is designed in part to test students' expertise and readiness to undertake independent research. It also is an opportunity to gain critical skills and produce scholarly products that contribute to students' records of accomplishment. The examination meets a variety of goals in students' training.
4. Specialty areas within the department have considerable latitude in structuring qualifying examinations. The material provided in the Appendices for each Area should be consulted to determine the specific protocols for the qualifying examination that are approved by the given Area. Area heads should also be consulted.
5. The written portion (i.e., Part I) of the Qualifying Examination generally follows one of three models:
 - a. Students submit one or two papers of publishable quality that represent work conducted since the second year project (depending on the students' Area and guidance committee requirements).
 - b. Students provide an analysis of the literature that is pertinent to the research that is being planned for the dissertation. This analysis or review may become or be the basis of the introduction to the dissertation.
 - c. Students are provided with questions on different topics formulated by their guidance committee. For each question, students write well-referenced responses to the questions over a period that might range up to five days.
6. We strongly recommend that students submit the written portion of the Qualifying Examination to committee members *by September 1st of the seventh semester*.
7. The written section of the examination is first submitted to the full Committee and each committee member evaluates the written material using the Departmental Evaluation. Committee members provide their feedback to students within two weeks of receiving the written portion of the exam. Only one failing vote is permitted for students to pass. The Committee Chair is responsible for summarizing these evaluations and sharing them with the student.

- a. If students fail the written portion of their exam, they can resubmit it one time to their committee. A second failure removes students from the program.
 - b. When students pass the written section, they may move on to the oral portion of the exam. After passing the written examination, students must provide their passing date and the scheduled date for the orals portion of the qualifying exam to the Academic Program Administrator.
 - c. After students pass the written portion of the examination they have 60 days to hold and complete their oral examination.
8. The oral exam portion (i.e., Part II) of the Qualifying Examination is focused on the dissertation proposal. After passing the written portion of the exam, students should submit a draft of their dissertation proposal to their committee. It is suggested that students individual meet with ALL committee members (both inside and outside) to develop their final version.
- a. The final version needs to be given to committee members two weeks prior to the scheduled orals. If students fail to meet this time line, committee members can cancel the scheduled orals.
 - b. The oral exam is usually scheduled for two hours.
 - c. During the oral examination, students present their proposed dissertation project. Committee members evaluate the oral defense using the Departmental Evaluation Form. The members vote to pass or fail the oral examination, and no more than one dissenting vote enables a pass. The Committee Chair is responsible for summarizing the evaluations and presenting them to students on the summary form.
 - d. Attendance of all guidance committee members is required at this meeting.
 - e. Students are *not* permitted to serve food to committee members during the oral portion of the Qualifying Examination.
9. A pass for the written or oral portion of the exam cannot be made contingent upon other factors, such as the completion of additional course work or supplemental literature review. However, it is possible for a student to pass the orals with changes yet to be made to the dissertation proposal.
10. If the vote of the guidance committee is a pass, students and their advisors should decide about retaining the current composition of the committee as discussed in L1.
11. In the event that the student fails the oral examination, the guidance committee may recommend to the Graduate School that the student be permitted to retake the orals. Requests for exceptions to this time period must be approved by the Department Chair. Students are not permitted to take the oral portion of the qualifying examination more than twice.
12. The retaking of a failed qualifying examination or any portion of a qualifying examination must take place *between one and six months from the date of the first examination*.

L. Admission to Candidacy

1. Admission to candidacy for a doctoral degree occurs only after students have
 - (a) passed the departmental course and screening requirements,
 - (b) completed at least 24 units at USC
 - (c) passed both parts of the qualifying examination.
2. Admission to candidacy is by action of the Dean of the Graduate School.
3. The DGS sends the Notice of Admission to Candidacy to the student.

M. Dissertation Committee

1. After students pass the qualifying examination, they must appoint a dissertation committee. At this point, the committee may be reduced to four members, with a AoC/CoC form that must be submitted to the Academic Program Administrator by the *last day of classes of the eighth semester in residence*. The Academic Program Administrator obtains the Department Chair and Dornsife Dean's signatures for approval. Typically, the minimum composition of the final committee is two members from Psychology from inside the student's area, one from Psychology but outside the student's area, and one member from outside the Psychology Department.

For example, a Social Area student would need at least two committee members from the Social area, at least one committee member from one of the other areas (i.e., BCS, Clinical, Developmental, or Quantitative), and at least one committee member from outside the Psychology Department. At least three members should be tenure-track faculty with their primary appointment in Psychology.

2. The committee member from outside the Psychology Department must be a tenure-track full-time member of the USC faculty, hold the rank of Assistant Professor or above, and be from a Ph.D. granting department other than Psychology. This member can have a joint appointment in Psychology if they are classified as "external" on the joint appointment list (see Appendix III).
3. RTPC faculty of exceptional standing may also serve as chairs of dissertation committees with written request of the Department Chair and approval of the Graduate School dean. To serve as chair, the RTPC member must have a primary appointment in the Psychology Department and must have a documented record of exceptional expertise and superior achievement in a field relevant to the student's project.
4. The composition of this committee is reported on the AoC/CoC form and must be uploaded to the Graduate School's Thesis Center by the student. Students are responsible for completing and submitting all required forms and to meet required deadlines.

5. Once the AoC/CoC form is uploaded, students should make an appointment with the Academic Program Administrator to run a degree check, update their STARS Report, and update their target graduation date.

N. Dissertation Registration

1. Students must register for dissertation units (PSYC 794) the semester after passing both parts of the qualifying examination. PSYC 794 is an “exceptional” course worth two units that provides students with full-time enrollment status. Students must be registered for dissertation units every semester (excluding summer sessions) until the degree requirements are completed.
2. Four units of registration in PSYC 794 (PSYC 794a and 794b) comprise the minimum requirement to degree. Under most circumstances these two registrations cover a time period of two semesters. Students must petition the department for both registrations to occur in the same semester.
3. Students may not receive more than eight units of credit for PSYC794.
4. While on internship, Clinical students must register for PSYC 691 (1 non-credit unit per semester) rather than PSYC 794.
5. Students must be registered for PSYC 691 or 794 during the semester when they actually complete their defense, unless they defend during the summer.

O. Dissertation and Defense of Dissertation

1. Students must inform the Academic Program Administrator when they schedule their dissertation defense meeting. Then students must setup a dissertation profile with the Graduate School Thesis Center website and follow requirements provided. This setup will also allow students to provide committee members access to their online Approval to Submit via the Graduate School Thesis portal that must be sent before the defense. At least two weeks before the scheduled defense, the Academic Program Administrator will post and distribute a notice of the meeting to all faculty and graduate students. When there is a Zoom online defense, a post will not be distributed unless requested by the student.
2. Candidates must submit a dissertation acceptable to their dissertation committee and to the Graduate School. The dissertation should be submitted to committee members at least two weeks prior to the final defense. The dissertation committee must approve the form of the dissertation as well as the content.
3. Generally the committee will require one of the following dissertation models:
 - a. The dissertation is prepared as a comprehensive treatise on the matter under investigation. It should include an extended discussion of all background literature that seems pertinent to the research as well as the methods, results and discussion of the findings.

- b. The dissertation is written in a form that would be suitable for a major publication. Pertinent background is cited and discussed as would be the case for a substantial journal article.
4. An oral defense of the dissertation is required of all candidates. The oral defense is conducted by the dissertation committee, and consistent with the Graduate School Handbook it is open to the general university community. However, only members of the dissertation committee have the authority to recommend acceptance. It is expected that the dissertation committee will meet privately to make this determination.
5. Students are *not* permitted to serve food to committee members during the oral dissertation defense.
6. Both the dissertation and the oral defense must have *unanimous approval* by the dissertation committee for satisfactory completion of the dissertation requirement. If the defense is satisfactory, the committee members sign the "Approval to Submit Defended and Final Copy of Dissertation" form. If additional work is required, the form must be signed only on full completion. Each committee member will have access to the electronic Approval to Submit set up by the student.
7. The submission website provides a schedule of specific dates for completing the various requirements to qualify the student for the Ph.D. degree at Commencement in May or to degree in August or December. For more information, visit to the Graduate School website: <http://graduateschool.usc.edu/> (click on Current Students, Thesis & Dissertation).
8. The dissertation must be written in APA style. In other words, dissertations must be prepared according to the manuscript submission guidelines specified in the current version of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*.

P. ACCESSIBILITIES SERVICES

The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is the unit at USC responsible for ensuring equal access for students with disabilities in compliance with state and federal law. The OSAS team is committed to serving the USC community through: ensuring equal access, removing disability-related obstacles, supporting civil rights, and increasing education and awareness on behalf of students with disabilities. Here is the link:

<https://osas.usc.edu/>

Q. GRIEVANCE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

To resolve distressing situations and conflicts between students and between students and faculty the following policies and procedures are as follows:

1. The first step is for students to consult with their faculty advisor. However, if speaking to the faculty advisor is inappropriate for a particular problem or if additional input is needed, the conflict may be brought to the attention of the Academic Program Administrator, the student's Area Head, the DGS, or the Department Chair. Here is the link:
<https://graduateschool.usc.edu/current-students/student-resources/#problem-solving>

2. It is expected that conflicts will first be addressed within the Department before resolution outside of the Department is sought. However, if issues are not resolved within the Department, students can consult the Office of the Ombuds. If necessary, the Graduate Division will refer students to the appropriate Dean as the final resource for resolution of grievances. Here is the link: <https://ombuds.usc.edu/>

3. Reporting options are available for students who experience discrimination, sexual assault, dating or domestic violence, or stalking. These options include:

USC Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards: <https://sjacs.usc.edu/>

Sexual Assault & Survivor Support: <https://studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault/>

Counseling and Mental Health: <https://studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling/>

Voice Peer Outreach Program: <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/voice-peer-outreach-program/>

R. EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

The Department is committed to fostering a positive climate for diversity for graduate students in Psychology. Students with concerns about equity, diversity, or inclusion are encouraged to seek out support or guidance from their mentors, advisors, and anyone in Department leadership. Among others, students are welcome to contact the following individuals: (list) students may share their concerns informally and anonymously with the individuals listed above or with other trusted advisors, or they may decide to make a complaint of discrimination formally with the campus Discrimination Prevention team of the Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. <https://eeotix.usc.edu/>

APPENDIX I
Specialty Area Requirements

REQUIREMENTS OF THE BRAIN & COGNITIVE SCIENCES (BCS) PROGRAM

The Brain and Cognitive Sciences area is composed of five interest subareas: cognitive science, cognitive neuroscience, behavioral neuroscience, clinical neuroscience and behavioral genetics. BCS covers such a broad range of research interests that students specialize in one or more collaborative areas depending on their interests. In addition to the Psychology Department requirements, all students are required to take Statistical Methods (PSYCH 500 or 501) and either PSYC 502 or PSYC 503. Students who have a strong background in statistics (i.e., equivalent to 500/501 and 502/503) may seek permission from their advisor to take PSYC 621 Seminar in Quantitative Psychology instead. BCS strongly recommends students take PSYC 547 Functional Neuroanatomy or PSYC 545 Neuropsychology, and/or PSYC 540 Cognitive Neuroscience.

Beyond these requirements, there are no formal course requirements because of the diversity of content and goals represented by different fields within BCS. Course loads are worked out individually for students in consultation with their faculty advisor and committee members to match and enhance students' areas of interest. Informally, scientific writing, grant writing, conference presentations, and development of the students' curriculum vita (CV) are facilitated by practical experience with advisor and committee guidance, by formal course requirements, and by informal student seminars (i.e., Graduate Association of Students in Psychology, GASP).

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that the most important aspect of training is research. Generally, a student is admitted with the sponsorship of an advisor, i.e., faculty member, whose research most closely matches the expressed interests of the student. This pairing is subject to mutual satisfaction, and may be altered by the student or the advisor. It is not possible for a student to advance without sponsorship by a faculty member in the BCS area.

This Handbook describes the requirements for passing the first year screening. Consistent with this emphasis on research, students will be evaluated on their research performance at the end of the first year. For this evaluation, students are encouraged to produce a written report of their first year research activities. The collaborative research relation between student and advisor is designed to be flexible and facilitate the fulfillment of this requirement. This report ideally should be reviewed by the advisor and at least two other BCS faculty members for quality control and to mimic the procedures in subsequent years. A faculty member from another department area can be added as a reviewer as needed or desirable. The result of this screening is due to the Area Head by July 15 and must be acceptable in order for the student to continue in the program. The Area Head conveys the outcome of this review to the DGS by August 15.

For evaluation of research progress in subsequent years see the departmental guidelines specified above concerning the second-year research requirement, the qualifying examination, and dissertation defense. BCS places a major focus on tailoring success to the individual in their chosen field of interest so there may be considerable variability among students in the program. Therefore, students must communicate with their respective advisor and committee about the conduct and benchmark expectations for a successful graduate career. This Handbook describes several types of qualifying written exams. Early and frequent communication between the student, advisor and committee is encouraged.

Students in BCS are given yearly feedback on their status and progress at the end of the Spring semester. The faculty review BCS students and report to the Area Head any praise, encouragement, and concerns. This report can satisfy first and second year screening if it conforms to the guidelines for those benchmarks given in this Handbook.

REQUIREMENTS OF THE CLINICAL SCIENCE PROGRAM

Please refer to the Clinical Science Handbook.

<https://dornsife.usc.edu/PSYC/clinical-documents-forms/>

REQUIREMENTS OF DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY PROGRAM

The Developmental Area requires that students:

- enroll in at least two and ideally three statistics courses
- are continuously enrolled in at least eight units of graduate work for the first three years of study
- are actively involved in research
- choose a program of study in the first two years
- enroll in the core developmental seminars PSYC 533 Cognitive Development and PSYC 534 Social Development

In addition students need to meet departmental distribution requirements: 8 units in Category A, and 16 units from Categories B and C (see “Course Requirements” above).

Statistics courses should be selected in consultation with the advisor and the area head. Students should take a minimum of two statistics courses in the Department of Psychology, selecting from PSYC 500, PSYC 501, PSYC 502, PSYC 503, and PSYC 575. Students may substitute one statistical methodology course from outside the department with approval of their advisor and the developmental area head. However, this course must focus exclusively on statistical methods. Developmental scientists require cutting-edge knowledge of statistical methods, and we strongly encourage students to consider taking three or more statistics courses (in consultation with your advisor). Additional recommended courses to consider are PSYC 504 and PSYC 524, which are research design courses that feature a great deal of statistical method content.

RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS

There are first year, second year, qualifying examination and dissertation research requirements that are very similar to the requirements of the Psychology PhD program as a whole.

Students may select one of two options for the written portion of the qualifying exam:

1. Students can write two papers of publishable quality that represent work conducted since their second year project. In some cases, one paper is acceptable (e.g., a multi-experiment paper, or a paper based on longitudinal data collection). The student's qualifying exam committee and advisor will determine in advance whether one or two papers is deemed acceptable for each student.
2. Students can write an analysis and review of the literature pertinent to the research they have planned for their dissertation. This option may provide the basis for the introduction and literature review section of their dissertation.

REQUIREMENTS OF QUANTITATIVE METHODS and COMPUTATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY (QMCP) PROGRAM

1. Course Requirements:

Students must take and pass a minimum of six (6) QMCP courses from the Category A list. Students who do not meet this requirement by the end of 5 years will be dismissed from the QMCP area. [Note: This assumes only one QMCP class per semester for 3 years. QMCP students should be taking at least one of these courses every semester until finishing their Qualifying Exam (see below).

It is possible to substitute one quantitative course from another department with the approval of both the student's main advisor and the Area Head. If the student's faculty advisor also serves as Area Head, a different QMCP faculty member will be required.

2. 2nd year project:

Same as the rest of the Department:

A written document must be approved by the evaluation committee by the last day of classes of the student's 4th semester (usually Spring). If not completed by this date, the student will be placed on warning status and must then have the project approved by the final faculty meeting of the 5th semester (usually Fall of the 3rd year). Students who do not meet this requirement will be dismissed from the program.

3. Qualifying Examination (QE) Timing:

The Qualifying Exam must be completed by the last day of classes at the end of the 7th semester, usually Fall of the 4th year. If the QE is not completed, the student will be placed on warning status and must complete by the end of the 8th semester, usually Spring of the 4th year.

4. Qualifying Examination Format:

The format of the QE is intended to be flexible, but the QE must be both written and oral. The format of the QE must be approved by both the guidance committee and the Area Head in advance of the deadlines above. Once again, if the student's faculty advisor also serves as Area Head, a different QMCP faculty member will be required. Suggestions for the written QE include any one of the following options:

(1) Two quantitative papers authored by the student (multiple authors are acceptable if the student is first author) which are considered suitable for submission for publication (or published),

(2) a timed closed book/notes test (usually several hours),

(3) Written responses to questions posed by the committee (usually several days). Other options may also be considered by the guidance committee. The oral exam will be reviewed by five faculty members, but must consist of at least two QMCP faculty members, and one Psychology faculty member outside of QMCP. Normally the oral exam will focus on a defense of the dissertation proposal, but may also include questions about any portion of the written exam.

REQUIREMENTS OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY PROGRAM

Course Requirements

The 36 substantive units required by the department (see C.2) must conform to the following requirements:

3 courses from Category A; if available, one of these courses should be a research methods course, which is to be taken during the first or second year of study.

1 course from Category B.

4 courses from Category C, which must include PSYC 512 taken in the first or second year, and three 600-level content seminars in social psychology (i.e., PSYC 612, which is taught by different professors covering different topics.) Students can count a 400-level PSYC course (with added readings/final assignment to make it suitable for graduate students) taught by one of the social faculty toward a 600-level requirement.

1 course in an area outside social psychology that is relevant to their research program and chosen with the consent of the advisor.

First Year Research Evaluation

Students are admitted with an advisor and should begin working on research their first semester. The goal of the first two semesters of research is to get a student socialized into the research process and set the stage for studies that will be part of their second-year project. Advisors will be asked to evaluate the amount and quality of research their first-year student has completed, at the area retreat at the end of the year. To do so, students and their advisors should create a working outline of the plan for the student's second year project and the steps they are taking in their first year to attain these goals. The student and the advisor will then evaluate the amount and quality of the work completed during the semester.

APPENDIX II

University Policy on Code of Ethics

For details on USC Code of Ethics policy, please visit the USC website:

<http://policies.usc.edu/>

APPENDIX III

Psychology Department Forms and Resources

Psychology Department Joint Appointment Faculty List
University Catalogue
Department Forms

<https://uscdornsife.usc.edu/secure/psyc/student-resources.cfm>

APPENDIX IV

Psychology Department Program Deadlines Summary

1 st Year	2 nd Year	3 rd Year
<p><u>First-Year Screening</u></p> <p>Deadline: Spring/Summer of 1st Year Screening:</p> <p>Areas evaluate students on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research performance • Completion of at least 16 units (of 4 courses, 3 must be substantive units) • Cumulative 3.0 GPA or higher • Each area may have additional requirements <p>By August 15th, the Area Head notifies students and the program whether they have passed the first-year screening</p>	<p><u>Second Year Research Requirement</u></p> <p>Deadline: Last Day of Classes of 4th Semester Screening:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Second Year Project in the form of a Research Report or Master's Thesis: See Handbook for details • Completed at least 24 PSYC units (including both substantive & non-substantive coursework) <p>After completing second year project, discuss with faculty advisor to form guidance committee for Qualifying Exam</p>	<p><u>Second Year Research Requirement II: Poster Fair</u></p> <p>Date: Typically Scheduled in September</p> <p>Third year students are required to present their second-year projects.</p> <p><u>Appointment of Committee Form for Qualifying Exam</u></p> <p>Deadline: Last Day of Classes of 6th semester</p>
4 th Year		5 th Year
<p><u>Qualifying Examination</u></p> <p>Deadline: Last Day of Classes of 7th Semester</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See Handbook for Qualifying Exam requirements • Areas may have additional requirements • After Written the portion of the exam (i.e., Part I) is completed, students and the faculty must report the passing date to the Academic Program Administrator. Then the student will receive the Graduate School Qualifying Examination Form from the Academic Program Administrator to be signed by committee members during the Oral portion of Examination (i.e., Part II). <p><u>Appointment of Committee Form for Dissertation</u></p> <p>Deadline: Last Day of Classes of 8th semester</p>		<p><u>Dissertation</u></p> <p>Deadline: Review Dates on Graduate School's Thesis Center Website</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students must set up a profile on the Graduate School's Thesis Center portal • Make appointment with Academic Program Administrator
Graduation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 60 Units min for Ph.D. • Required Department Coursework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required Area Coursework • Completed All Milestones

By my signature, I acknowledge that I have read and understand the contents of this handbook.

Student Name: _____

Student Signature: _____

Date: _____