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DEPARTMENT of PSYCHOLOGY

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## **THESIS (PSY-510)**

*Updated August 2022*

### *Catalog Description*

Conduct original research under the supervision of a three-person committee (chaired by the supervising faculty member). A proposal, research paper and an oral presentation are required. May contribute only once to major requirements. 4 credits. Prerequisites: PSY-111 and (PSY-202 or BIO-222) and instructor permission

### *Overview*

Thesis (PSY-510) offers students the opportunity to engage in all stages of an original research project under the guidance of a professor in Furman's Psychology Department. The experience is closely modeled after a master's level thesis in that students both propose and defend the research project to a committee of three faculty members. Two APA-style papers are written: a formal research proposal and a full-length comprehensive research paper.

The thesis is a year-long commitment that carries a minimum of 6 credits. Typically, students begin the research process with a 2-credit Supervised Research (PSY-509) in the fall semester. The 4-credit Thesis course (PSY-510) is taken in the spring semester. Students who are planning to graduate in December have the option to enroll in PSY-509 in the spring semester, followed by PSY-510 in the fall semester of the year they are graduating. In either case, the student and research mentor must agree at midsemester of the semester in which PSY-509 is taken that sufficient progress has been made and enrollment in PSY-510 the following semester is advisable. If not, the student should enroll in a seminar the following semester in order to fulfill the Capstone requirement of the major.

PSY-510 fulfills the Capstone Requirement of the psychology major. A letter grade will be assigned by the faculty research supervisor. Per university policy, no more than 12 hours of credit earned through individualized instruction (i.e., PSY-505, PSY-509, PSY-510) may contribute to the 128 credits required for graduation.

### *Eligibility*

All psychology majors are eligible to do a thesis project, as long as they have a faculty sponsor in the department (see *Tips for Students*). It is strongly recommended that students gain research experience outside of the classroom setting before embarking on a thesis project (e.g., summer research fellowship, supervised research).

### *Thesis Committee*

In consultation with the supervising professor, the student should invite two additional faculty members to serve on the thesis committee. The faculty supervisor will act as chair of the committee. In most cases, all three members of the committee are professors in Furman's Psychology Department. When appropriate, however, one of the three committee members may come from outside the department. The role of the committee is to provide additional guidance on the student's design and execution, as well as the oral and written presentations of the study. They should also query the student during the proposal and defense presentation to evaluate the students' understanding of the research. Faculty should make every effort to serve on a student's committee when asked, as this is a valued departmental service.

### *Requirements for Research Topics*

Research projects may use any number of quantitative methodological approaches (e.g., self-report, experimental, meta-analysis). Thesis projects must represent original research. As such, direct replications or continuations of research projects started in other contexts are not acceptable. Students who wish to research a topic that they have previously worked on or written about should consult with their faculty research supervisor in advance of writing the research proposal. If there is a question about what constitutes unacceptable overlap, the committee should meet to discuss the issue.

A student who wishes to do a thesis project that does not meet the above criteria (e.g., analyzing data from an existing data set, proposing a qualitative study) may submit a written appeal to the thesis committee and department chair prior to the thesis proposal (i.e., during the semester in which the student is enrolled in PSY-509). In order for an appeal to be approved, it must garner unanimous support from all parties.

### *Proposing the Research*

When the student and faculty research supervisor have decided on a research question, the student should prepare an APA-style research proposal that includes a literature review, rationale for the proposed study, detailed method section (including participants, materials, design, and procedure as appropriate), hypotheses, analytical plan, and implications of the anticipated results. Copies of the proposal should be sent to all members of the committee at least 5 business days before the committee meets to discuss the proposal. Committee members are expected to read the proposal in advance of the meeting and come prepared with questions and/or written feedback on the proposal.

The student is responsible for scheduling the proposal based on committee members' availabilities and can request assistance from the department's Administrative Assistant to reserve a room.

When the committee meets for the research proposal, the primary goal is to provide constructive feedback that can be used to strengthen the project. The meeting will begin with the student orally presenting the research proposal (typically 15-20 minutes). At the conclusion of the meeting, the student will be dismissed and the committee will confer to decide whether the project can be approved in its current form (with or without recommended changes) or if changes are necessary.

**Students may not begin data collection (except for pilot data) until the project has been approved by the committee.** In order for a student to enroll in PSY-510, the proposal must be approved by the committee no later than the end of the semester in which the student is enrolled in PSY-509.

### *Defending the Research*

When the project concludes, the student is required to write a full-length, research paper that includes all essential elements of an APA-style manuscript: abstract, introduction, method, results (including figures/tables), discussion, and complete reference list. Copies of the paper should be sent to all members of the committee at least 5 business days before the committee meets for the research defense. Committee members are expected to read the paper in advance of the meeting and come prepared with questions and/or written feedback on the paper.

The student is responsible for scheduling the defense based on committee members' availabilities and reserving a room. The final presentation must occur no later than two days before the last day of the final exam period. Except in special circumstances, thesis defenses will be open to the entire Psychology Department community. The student is welcome to invite others outside of the department.

When the committee meets for the defense, the primary goal is to provide an opportunity for the student to deliver a research-based oral presentation and respond to questions. The meeting will begin with the student's oral presentation (typically 20-35 minutes). At the conclusion of the meeting, the student and any other non-committee members will be dismissed and the committee will confer to decide whether the student successfully completed the requirements of the PSY-510 and if revisions to the paper are necessary. The faculty advisor has sole discretion on the final grade in the course.

The final version of the thesis will be submitted electronically to both the chair and administrative assistant of the Psychology Department.

### *Tips for Students*

- Doing a thesis project is a valuable experience for all psychology majors, but may be especially critical for students who are considering applying to PhD programs. In most cases, high-quality undergraduate research experiences are far more important to graduate programs than a specific research topic.
- We encourage students to plan early and gain research experience before undertaking a thesis project. A summer research fellowship in the summer before senior year may be an especially good way to prepare for a thesis project and develop a strong working relationship with a faculty mentor.
- Be advised that each professor considers a variety of factors when deciding whether to supervise a thesis project. Moreover, faculty members very rarely supervise more than one thesis project in any given year. If you think that you might want to do a thesis project in a particular lab, have a conversation with that faculty member early and understand that they are under no obligation to sponsor your project.
- We recommend that students who are interested in doing a thesis project start to make arrangements during their junior year.