

Virginia State University

Department of Psychology

Master's Degree Program

Policies and Procedures Manual

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Master's Degree Handbook

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Program Mission

To prepare students for doctoral-level training in psychology and to provide them with the skills necessary to serve as effective agents of social change, particularly in culturally diverse communities.

I. OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM

A. GENERAL INFORMATION

This manual provides guidance and directives for the Master's in Psychology Program in the Department of Psychology at Virginia State University (VSU). Students should read this manual to learn of Departmental policies and guidelines of the program. Students may also utilize the College of Graduate Studies handbook for basic policies governing all graduate programs at the University. Please note that there are two distinct concentrations to the program: the research focused general concentration and the clinical concentration.

B. RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY AND INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

The Virginia State University Master's in Psychology Program recognizes, understands, respects and values the complexity of individual differences and sociocultural diversity. Subsequently, a major component of this program is the recruitment and inclusion of professionals, trainers and students from diverse cultural, social and ethnic backgrounds.

C. NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY

The purpose of this policy is to establish clearly and unequivocally that the Department of Psychology prohibits the inequitable and unlawful treatment based on an individual's protected characteristics or statuses -- race, sex, color, national origin, religion, age, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, pregnancy, genetic information, disability, or any other status protected by law. The Department forbids discrimination, sexual assault, harassment, dating violence, domestic violence, stalking and retaliation as well as any other sexual misconduct by individuals subject to its control, supervision or influence. The Department of Psychology abides by the APA Code of Ethics and ascribes to the principles encoded in its preamble. Recognizing benevolence, responsibility, integrity, justice, and respect for the rights and dignity of others is core to inclusion and a conscious non-discriminatory approach to all who fall within the Department's sphere of influence.

D. GOALS OF THE MASTER'S PROGRAM

While the primary focus of the graduate aspect of the psychology department is to prepare students for doctoral level training in psychology, the General Psychology concentration prepares students to become psychological scientists and professors, whereas the Clinical Psychology concentration prepares students to work in the public mental health sector including mental health agencies, prisons, and hospitals. At the

conclusion of the Psychology program, students possess skills which are marketable and consequently are able to serve as effective agents of social change.

E. PROGRAM COORDINATORS

Each of the program concentrations has its own program coordinator who serves as student's academic advisor and key point of contact for their respective program concentration. Currently the coordinator for the general concentration is Dr. Samuel West (sawest@vsu.edu) and the coordinator for the clinical concentration is Dr. Jennifer Sutherland (jsutherland@vsu.edu).

F. STUDENT RESOURCES

The VSU department of psychology maintains several key resources for psychology graduate students.

➔ **Microsoft Teams Space** – There is a group in Microsoft Teams titled “Psych Grad Lounge” where all grad students can interact. This space also allows access to critical files and resources for your time in the program. Make sure someone adds you to the Teams group using your official VSU email account.

➔ **Grad Student Lounge** – In addition to the space on Teams we also maintain a physical lounge for the graduate students in our department. Located in Hunter McDaniel room 101 (just across from the main psychology offices). This space can be used by all graduate students for any relevant purpose. It contains 6 desktop computers that are available for students to use on a first come first serve basis. The lounge also has a projector and screen for students to practice presentations and a small kitchenette (i.e., mini fridge and microwave) for food. Please ask a student or faculty for the code to access the lounge.

II. ADMISSION AND ENROLLMENT

A. ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

The screening process for the MS program begins on April 1st of each year. Students may be entered into the program unconditionally and conditionally. To be considered for admission to the Master's Program, a student must:

Unconditional Admission

1. Have a minimum of 15 semester hours in psychology, including at least one course in each of the following: 1) social, personality, cognitive, or developmental psychology, 2) research methods, quantitative methods, or experimental psychology, and 3) physiological psychology. Students applying to the Master's

Clinical Psychology program must have an additional course in abnormal psychology;

2. Submit official transcripts of undergraduate coursework.
3. Submit official GRE scores. The GRE is required for all applicants in the **clinical MS concentration and doctoral programs**.
4. Complete a VSU Graduate School Application and the Psychology Department Supplemental Application, including a resume.
5. Submit a written personal statement (not to exceed three pages, double spaced) that describes your personal background, academic experience and future goals (professional and educational);
6. Submit three current letters of recommendation from professors, employers, and other professionals qualified to assess the applicant's ability to complete a Master's degree in Psychology. At least two letters should be from professors and/or psychologists.

Students who are most competitive for unconditional admission will have:

- A. An overall undergraduate grade point average of 3.00 (on a scale of 4.00 points)
- B. Have a minimum verbal GRE score of 153 and quantitative GRE score of 144.
GRE scores should not be older than six years.

Conditional Admission

1. Applicants can be granted conditional admission under the general provisions of the Graduate School whenever the requirements in **A)**, **B)**, and/or **C)** above are not met if additional program slots are available.
2. To be granted conditional admission, applicants also must have a minimum grade point average of 2.8 in the undergraduate major, a 3.00 grade point average during last two years of undergraduate course work.
3. To remove oneself from conditional status and achieve unconditional status, students must:
 - A. Complete all undergraduate prerequisites listed on the Program Card by the program coordinator,
 - B. Earn a B average, with no grade below C, in the first 15 graduate-level hours of their planned program of study and
 - C. Successfully complete PSYC 528 with a B or better.

B. TRANSFER CREDITS

Students who would like to transfer courses taken at another institution must get approval from their Program Coordinator and the Chairperson of the Department. Students should initiate the process by reviewing the transcript and course descriptions with the Program Coordinator. The student will be asked to provide syllabi, course outlines or other course materials to facilitate the evaluation of the coursework. All transfer work must be at the "A" or "B" level from an accredited institution.

C. ENROLLMENT

The program is designed for full time students. To complete the program in the recommended timeframe, students should carry a course load of 9-15 hours per semester. Students should always plan to seek input from their respective Program Coordinator prior to registration. All students must maintain continuous enrollment in Master's level courses (at least one credit hour) for each fall and spring session (except for official leaves of absence) until they have completed all program requirements. Enrollment during the summer session cannot be accepted in place of registration for fall and spring sessions. Students must be registered for at least one credit hour during the semester they graduate. A student who does not enroll in courses for a fall or spring semester and has not been granted a formal leave of absence may be subject to dismissal from the program.

D. LEAVES OF ABSENCE

While the department discourages students from taking leaves of absence in the middle of the program, students may be granted a leave of absence under certain circumstances. To apply for a leave of absence, submit a written petition and all supporting documents to the Coordinator of the Program. The petition must be approved by the Coordinator of the Program and the Chairperson of the Department. Students are granted a leave of absence for a stated period, usually not to exceed one year. A leave of absence during the academic year may be granted for verifiable personal, military, or medical reasons or emergencies. For medical leaves, written petitions must be accompanied by a statement from the doctor.

E. TIME LIMIT FOR COMPLETION OF DEGREE

The maximum time allotted for completion of the Master's Degree is within six (6) calendar years from the date of initial registration in the program. Students may send a written request to the Chair of the University Graduate Policies and Petitions Committee for an extension beyond the six years.

F. COMMENCEMENT ELIGIBILITY

While Virginia State University celebrates the achievements of its students through commencement ceremonies, it is important to note that participation in these events is ceremonial and does not equate to the conferral of a degree. Students are eligible to participate in commencement only if they have fulfilled all academic requirements and resolved any outstanding financial or administrative obligations to the University.

All prospective graduates must submit a formal graduation application and pay the required graduation fee, regardless of their intent to participate in the ceremony. Additionally, students must adhere to all guidelines regarding attire, conduct, and attendance at mandatory rehearsals to ensure a dignified and respectful celebration of academic achievement.

Participation in commencement is a privilege extended to eligible students, and the University reserves the right to enforce policies that uphold the integrity and decorum of this significant academic tradition.

III. GRADES AND EVALUATIONS

A. GRADES

Each student must complete all required and elective coursework with a grade of “B” or higher and maintain a cumulative GPA of at least 3.0 with no more than two grades of “C” (including grades of U and SP) and receive a favorable review by the departmental graduate faculty committee. For anyone with two (2) grades below “B”, or 1 grade below “C”, their continuing status will be subject to further departmental review. If the course with the unfavorable grade of “C” or below” is retaken and a higher grade is earned, the higher grade will be considered in the review. Each student will be evaluated annually.

This evaluation will include academic performance, departmental contribution, and professionalism. Thus, in the event of any concern, written documentation will be given to the student.

B. STUDENT ANNUAL REVIEWS AND EVALUATIONS

Each student will be evaluated annually in areas such as progress in the program, coursework, scholarship, and research activities, as well as departmental contribution, ethics, and professionalism. Evaluations may also include clinical training (if applicable). This evaluation is conducted by the department faculty.

Students are required to complete coursework with a grade of “B” or higher (see Grades) and successfully complete programmatic milestones in a timely manner. Students are also expected to engage in scholarly activities and professional development outside of the classroom and beyond the requirements detailed here. These activities will also be considered in annual evaluations of student progress. **Students must plan to attend departmental seminars (i.e., our bi-weekly PSYCH OUT lecture series) as they are able and must present at the departmental seminar at least once during their time in the program.**

C. CONDUCT EVALUATION PROCEDURES

Students are required to show good standing in the program. Thus, upon evaluation, students who fail to complete programmatic milestones, fail to meet the minimum grade requirements, or are found to be in violation of the program or university’s Professional Conduct Code in any other way will receive a warning letter and be put on probation. **During this probationary period the student is expected to complete the milestone in question or raise her/his grade point average by the end of the following semester.** Failure to successfully meet expectations and adjust the behavior in question during the probationary period may lead to termination from the Program.

Dismissal from the Program. If students do not make reasonable efforts to resolve issues that lead to programmatic probation, the Program Coordinator will make a recommendation to Chairperson and the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies regarding a student’s dismissal from the Program. Students have the right to appeal this decision to the Graduate School (see Appeals Process). Students who have been terminated are ineligible to register in any semester or summer session until they have been properly reinstated.

D. APPEALS PROCESS

According to the College of Graduate Studies, the appeal's procedure for a student in the case of a complaint about perceived inaccurate or unfair evaluations is: 1) first contact the Coordinator of Program 2) if the appeal is not resolved at the level of the Coordinator of the Program, then the student should contact the Department Chairperson; 3) and if the appeal is not resolved at the level of the Department Chairperson then the student should contact the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies for review of the situation by the Policies and Petitions Committee. The chairman of this committee is the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies. The form for the appeals process is provided in Appendix B.

IV. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

One of the cornerstones of being a professional psychologist is continual improvement through professional development. As beginning scholars there is an expectation that you will begin your careers by practicing professional development in graduate school as this reflects the expectations of your behavior over the course of your career.

Professional development includes attending non-mandatory trainings, providing trainings, performing and disseminating research, and exploring theoretically and scientifically relevant information through conference attendance and group affiliation.

It is therefore suggested by faculty in the Master's Degree Program that students engage in research, join professional organizations (State and/or national) and attend/and or present at workshops, seminars, and professional conferences.

Students must also plan to attend departmental seminars (i.e., our bi-weekly PSYCH OUT lecture series) as they are able and must present at the departmental seminar at least once during their time in the program.

V. PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

A. CODE OF CONDUCT

Students are expected to abide by all University rules and regulations, and standards, and by the laws of Chesterfield County, the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the Federal government. It is not possible to list all acts of misconduct/disorderly conduct that can occur on campus, but students are required to exhibit the highest forms of good manners, behavior, and respect for the University community and its inhabitants.

B. CODE OF ETHICS

Students are expected to exhibit exemplary ethical behavior as part of the University community and society. Acts of academic dishonesty, including cheating, plagiarism, deliberate falsification, and other unethical acts that may be specifically defined by a student's individual discipline, are considered breaches of the Student Code of Ethics.

C. NONACADEMIC TERMINATION POLICY

Students are required to follow the American Psychological Association as well as VSU ethical standards and academic integrity policies. Students must be able to perform and communicate on a graduate level and professionalism must be maintained at all times. This professional standard applies to classroom settings, research activities and community events. Consistent demonstration of unprofessional and unethical behavior will not be tolerated and serve as grounds for immediate dismissal from the program.

D. ACADEMIC DISHONESTY/ PLAGIARISM

Academic dishonesty is a violation of the Student Academic Code. It is the student's responsibility to seek guidance from the instructor when there are questions or doubt pertaining to their academic integrity responsibilities. By accepting admission to Virginia State University, students are automatically subject to the provisions of the Student Academic Code and are expected to uphold and support this Code without compromise or exception.

Students are expected to comply with reporting procedures when they notice a violation, and all cases of academic dishonesty shall be reported by the instructor to the Program Coordinator and the Chairperson of the Department. The Chairperson of the Department shall report the incident to the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies. Penalties for academic dishonesty may be loss of credit for the work in question, loss of credit for the course, suspension, or expulsion from the University. Students have the right to dispute any action in accordance with the Student Grievance Procedure (see form in Appendix B). Ignorance of any aspect of the Student Academic Code is not a defense to an alleged violation.

Cheating: Cheating is obtaining an unearned academic advantage either through deliberate deception or indifference to the student academic code. A student is considered to be cheating if, in the opinion of the person administering an examination or assigned class work the student gives, seeks, or receives aid.

Cheating also includes, but is not limited to: (1) deliberate alteration of graded material for a re-grade or grade correction; (2) submitting without authorization the same assignment for credit in more than one course; (3) collaborating on any work when not allowed, either in or outside the classroom setting; (4) forging the signature of another or allowing forgery by another on any classroom related document such as class roll or an academic pledge; (5) use of unauthorized material stored or recorded on electronic devices during an exam or quiz; (6) use of "crib" notes or other unauthorized written material during an exam or quiz; (7) attempting to or allowing impersonation by another in order to take one's exam or quiz; (8) copying, alteration or fabrication of data such as that collected in a teaching laboratory or as part of a research project; and (9) intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to help another commit an act of academic dishonesty.

Plagiarism: Part of the college experience is the discovery of one's own voice. The Virginia State University teaching community is committed to helping each student find

their voice. Plagiarism contradicts this end. Plagiarism is the presentation of others' ideas or written works as one's own. Written works can take the form of electronic or print media and could include - among other items - opinions, facts, and statistics. The following are examples of plagiarism.

1. Direct copying without an acknowledgment, either using quotation marks or a clear statement describing how that material was reproduced.
2. Not indicating a source when using unique words or phrases from the source. Words or phrases are considered unique if they would not be spoken or expressed the same way coincidentally. The use of unique language requires incorporation of quotation marks or a direct statement indicating who is responsible for the word, phrase, sentence, or group of sentences.
3. Not citing a source when an idea or written work can be attributed in any way to someone else.
4. Not acknowledging the contribution of any person who is a significant contributor to a work through discussion or any other such collaboration.

Although "common knowledge" does not require a reference, one may not be aware of what constitutes common knowledge. The golden rule is, when in doubt, cite. Specific examples of plagiarism are provided on the Virginia State University Academic Code Blackboard site. These examples were reproduced from the Code of Academic Integrity and Acknowledging the Work of Others, prepared by the Office of the Dean of Faculty, Cornell University and used with permission.

The code of conduct section was taken from the Virginia State University Student Handbook. Please refer to the handbook for the university's Code of Conduct in its entirety.

VI. GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS

A. GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS

There are two types of graduate assistantships in the Department of Psychology: University supported graduate teaching assistantships (GTA) and research supported assistantships (research grants). Graduate teaching assistantships are for the academic year (beginning the first week before classes and ending the second week in May), although duties might change at the beginning of each semester. They may carry a workload up to 15 hours per week.

Applicants will be notified of their assignments by the Coordinator of the GTA Committee. All assignments will be reviewed at the beginning of each semester. Occasionally, the department may need to make changes in assignments during the year on a case-by-

case basis. In addition, attention will be given to insure comparability in workloads across assistantships.

Graduate Assistants are expected to post and maintain regular office hours to insure availability to the undergraduate students and VSU faculty and staff. Performance on all assistantships is evaluated each semester. [Click here to learn more.](#)

B. TERMINATION OF FUNDING

Student funding is based on the availability of university funds. Graduate assistantships normally end when the period of appointment is concluded, and the term of the assistantship agreement is fulfilled. An appointment also may end when the grant or contract supporting the student expires, for whatever reason, even if that occurs before the end of the student's current appointment. A graduate assistantship may be terminated for many reasons including:

1. Resignation/ withdrawal from the program by the student. A formal written request should be submitted to the program coordinator and department chair, with a copy to the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies;
2. Performance issues that result in termination as agreed upon by the supervising faculty member, department chair and program Coordinator, with a copy to the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies;
3. Academic dishonesty - failure of the graduate assistant to remain in good academic standing or to adhere to enrollment policies in accordance with this policy statement.

VII. CURRICULUM REQUIREMENTS

A. CORE CLASSES – BOTH CONCENTRATIONS

Students in either concentration must complete the same set of core program courses described below.

Course Number	Name	Credits
PSYC 510	Pro Seminar	3
PSYC 530	Ethics and Professional Standards of Practice	3
PSYC 580	Statistical Methods in Health Psychology I	3
PSYC 581	Statistical Methods in Health Psychology II	3
PSYC 528	Experimental Design	3
*PSYC 599	Research & Thesis	6 (total)

*Note – Students may take between 1 and 6 credits of PSYC 599 during their thesis work to best fit their schedule and tuition cost needs. All students must complete **a total of 6 PSYC 599 credits prior to graduation** which can be done in any combination.

B. GENERAL CONCENTRATION

In addition to the core classes above students on the general concentration must also complete at least **four** elective courses which can be satisfied by any 3-credit psychology course at the 500 level or above. See Appendix C for a full list of psychology courses that can fulfill this requirement. **The minimum number of credits to complete the general concentration is 33.**

C. CLINICAL CONCENTRATION

Students in the Clinical concentration have a more specific program of study and are required to take the following courses in addition to the program core (i.e., there are no elective required for the clinical concentration). **The minimum number of credits to complete the clinical concentration is 48.**

Course Number	Name	Credits
PSYC 508	Psychotherapy I: Theories	3
PSYC 512	Human Growth & Development	3
PSYC 517	Advanced Psychopathology	3
PSYC 519	Psychotherapy II: Techniques	3
PSYC 520	Psychological Assessment I: Intelligence & Achievement	3
PSYC 521	Psychological Assessment II: Personality	3
PSYC 522	Practicum I: Assessment Lab	3
PSYC 523	Practicum II	3
PSYC 524	Practicum III	3

Example Clinical Concentration Schedule

Fall 1

Spring 1

PSYC 520 Psyc Assessment I	3hrs.	PSYC 521 Psyc Assessment II	3hrs.
PSYC 517 Advanced Psychopathology	3hrs.	PSYC 519 Psychotherapy II: Techniques	3hrs.
PSYC 510 Pro-seminar	3hrs.	PSYC 528 Experimental Design	3hrs.
PSYC 522 Practicum I	3hrs.	PSYC 508 Psychotherapy I: Theories	3hrs.

Fall 2**Spring 2**

PSYC 530 Ethics	3hrs.	PSYC 524 Practicum III	3hrs.
PSYC 523 Practicum II	3hrs.	PSYC 512 Human Growth & Dev.	3hrs.
PSYC 580 Statistical Methods in Health Psychology	3hrs.	PSYC 581 Statistical Methods in Health Psychology II	3hrs.
PSYC 599 Research & Thesis	3 hrs.	PSYC 599 Research & Thesis	3hrs.

Example General Concentration Schedule**Fall 1****Spring 1**

PSYC 580 Statistical Methods in Health Psychology I	3hrs.	PSYC 581 Statistical Methods in Health Psychology II	3hrs.
PSYC 510 Pro-seminar	3hrs.	PSYC 528 Experimental Design	3hrs.
PSYC 530 Ethics	3hrs.	*PSYC 512 Human Growth & Devt.	3hrs.

Fall 2**Spring 2**

PSYC 599 Research & Thesis	3hrs.	PSYC 599 Research & Thesis	3 hrs.
*PSYC 517 Adv. Psychopathology.	3 hrs.	*PSYC 527 Personality Theory	3 hrs.
*PSYC 532: Diagnosis/ Treatment of Substance Abuse	3hrs.		

*Classes marked with an asterisk are examples of elective classes in the example schedule above. See Appendix C for a full list of elective options.

VIII. THE THESIS PROCESS

Students in the Master's Program in the Psychology Department at Virginia State University must write a thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Psychology. The thesis is a professional document that is based on an independent research project conducted by the student. The first step in the thesis process is selecting a thesis advisor.

A. THESIS ADVISOR

The thesis advisor you select should be someone who has similar research interests as you and someone with whom you are comfortable working. Students typically meet with their advisors once a week. Students must select a full-time faculty member with Graduate Faculty status to serve as the thesis advisor. To verify if a faculty member has this status, the student may contact the Chairperson of the Psychology Department or the office of the College of Graduate Studies. You must request a meeting with your potential thesis advisor to discuss your project and to ensure they will serve as your thesis advisor. **If you plan to register during the summer, discuss your plans with your advisor prior to registering.** Together, the student and the research advisor select a research topic for the thesis. The student, guided by the advisor, selects his/her thesis committee.

B. THESIS COMMITTEE

The thesis committee should include a minimum of three members. The Chair of the Committee will be the student's thesis advisor and must have Graduate Faculty status. A fourth faculty member may serve on the thesis committee in the capacity of consultant. Consultants do not have input toward the student's grade for the thesis course.

C. PROPOSAL DEFENSE

The purpose of the proposal defense is to present the thesis topic and research design to the committee for approval. All Master's level students must also submit a thesis proposal to their committee. The proposal should include Chapter 1 (Introduction), Chapter 2 (Selected Review of the Literature) and Chapter 3 (Methodology) and must be written in the format recommended by the American Psychological Association. Prior to the proposal defense, the student must be in good standing as a graduate student at the University. Once the advisor approves the thesis proposal document, the student convenes a proposal defense meeting with his/her thesis committee. The thesis proposal must be submitted to the committee at least two weeks before the proposal defense. All members of the thesis committee must attend the proposal meeting and approve the topic before the student is allowed to proceed. If the proposal does not meet with the committee's approval, they may elect to hold an additional meeting.

D. SUBMITTING AN IRB APPLICATION

All research on human participants conducted at the University must be approved by the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Submission to the IRB involves completing a protocol form, writing a brief description of the design and methodology, completion of an informed consent form and completing the responsible conduct of research training from the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) website (<https://citiprogram.org>). The instructions and forms for review can be found on the web at <https://www.vsu.edu/research/research-compliance/human-subjects.php>. Data collection cannot begin until the student receives written permission from the IRB. Students must also make sure they are aware of the IRB's meeting and submission due dates for the semester.

E. THE THESIS

For many graduate students, the thesis may be their first professional document. The thesis represents an independent research project that demonstrates the student's ability to review current literature relevant to the student's project; to design an original study that will scientifically and strategically test a hypothesis, to statistically analyze data, and orally present and defend his/her results. Students typically enroll in the thesis research course (PSYC 599) each semester in their second year of the program. The thesis must meet the minimum requirements of 'VSU Master's Theses'.

Students must register for the thesis course (PSYC 599) each semester that they are working on the thesis. Students will receive a grade of "S" or "U" for each semester they are registered for thesis credits, except for the last semester they are registered for thesis credits, in which they must receive a grade of "P" to be awarded a master's degree. Receiving a "U" in any thesis work is tantamount to failing a course and will count toward the number of unsatisfactory grades that can lead to possible termination from the program. Students will not be awarded an "I" at any time for the research and thesis course. To facilitate the thesis process, students may complete a *Thesis Research Planning Form* (see Appendix A) at the beginning of each semester for which they are registered for thesis credits. This form is intended to clarify both the student and advisor's expectations regarding work on the thesis and should be signed by both parties.

F. WRITING AND FORMATTING THE THESIS DOCUMENT

The thesis has 5 chapters: Introduction, Selected Review of the Literature, Methodology, Results and Discussion. These chapters should be written to comply with the Graduate School's Thesis Manual and the American Psychological Association Publication Manual. Students may obtain a copy of Graduate School's Thesis Manual from the Graduate Studies Office. In addition to these requirements, students must also comply with the requirements of the Psychology Department as set forth in this manual.

IX.

THESIS ORAL EXAMINATION (DEFENSE)

A. REQUIREMENTS FOR THE THESIS ORAL EXAMINATION

Each Master's level student must orally defend the thesis as a requirement in partial fulfillment of the Master's degree. A final oral examination of the thesis will be held when the student has completed the thesis to the satisfaction of the student's advisor, all other requirements for the degree have been completed, and a 3.0 grade point average has been earned. A student is eligible to be examined on a thesis if the student: (a) has met all program requirements for a thesis examination, (b) is in good standing as a graduate student at the University, (c) is registered for thesis credits (*PSYC 599: Research and Thesis*), (d) has a Thesis Committee, and (e) has at least a 3.0 grade point average.

The student must submit the final thesis document to the committee at least two weeks prior to the scheduled examination. **The thesis advisor will send an announcement to the department inviting everyone to the oral examination.** Oral examinations must be attended by all members of the student's thesis committee.

B. PROCEDURES FOR THE ORAL EXAMINATION

The oral examination consists of a professional presentation by the student on the main aspects of the research reported in the thesis. The oral examination requires the student to give a 15-20 minute presentation that emphasizes the results and implications of their thesis research. The presentation should also include a brief description of the background and significance, methodology, main findings or results, implications, and future directions. After the presentation, the student will field questions from the thesis committee members. Questions from non-committee members of the Graduate Faculty, and graduate students from the candidate's graduate program will be permitted. The Chair of the thesis committee will determine whether questions are appropriate and germane to the thesis topic and how much time will be allotted for answers. After the oral examination, the student and any others who are not members of the thesis committee will be asked to leave the room and the thesis committee will discuss whether the thesis document (including the oral defense) is satisfactory.

A student who fails his/her oral examination may, at the discretion of the thesis committee, be allowed another examination not earlier than one semester after his/her failure.

X. STEPS FOR COMPLETING A THESIS IN PSYCHOLOGY

Note that there are considerably more steps involved in your thesis process – the table and timeline below are meant to give you an overview of milestones during the process and a clear indication of certain requirements and forms that must be completed.

Activity	Explanation	Timeline
1. Select your Thesis Advisor	The advisor/mentor must be a member of the Graduate Faculty (see pages 20-21 of this handbook) in the department of psychology. You must meet with the faculty you wish to choose as an advisor – the faculty must also agree to work with you as your thesis advisor before you proceed. Your advisor will work with you to begin developing your project. All steps of your project should be approved by your advisor.	This process begins as soon as you start your first semester here. You should do all you can to interact with different faculty, read their research, and chat with them about your interests. You need to have a confirmed thesis advisor early in your third semester at the latest.
2. Enroll in Research and Thesis Course PSYC 599	Once you have selected an advisor and they have agreed to work with you, you must register for PSYC 599 under your advisor for the following semester.	Typically begins the third semester – only enroll once step 1 is complete.
3. Select Thesis Committee	Your advisor will work directly with you to select the members of your thesis committee. Your committee must comprise at least three faculty from the Psychology Department including your advisor. Like your advisor, you must contact potential committee members to ask them to join your committee.	This should be the first order of business with you and your advisor once you have pinned down your thesis topic.
4. Complete Thesis Topic Form	Must be filed with the School of Graduate Studies at least six months before the candidate expects to graduate – strongly advised to submit as soon as you know who your advisor is and what your topic will be. Click here for the form.	Submit this form ASAP – must be done before you propose.

5. Thesis Proposal	Once your proposal document has been completed and approved by your advisor you must submit the document to your thesis committee at least 2 weeks before your proposal date – although more time is strongly advised. Note that your proposal MUST be approved by your advisor before you can propose. Action Item: Complete and Submit the Thesis Planning Form to your program coordinator (Appendix A) BEFORE your proposal meeting.	Students should aim to propose their thesis project by the end of Semester 3. Some do not meet this goal – this is assuming ideal circumstances
6. IRB application + CITI training	Your study must be approved by the VSU IRB before data collection begins – see the IRB page for more details. You will be required to maintain CITI ethics certifications for human subjects research. You can access these trainings here: https://about.citiprogram.org/ - simply make an account and link it with VSU. The trainings you need will automatically show up. This certificate must be submitted along with your IRB application.	This can happen at any time once your advisor has approved your project, but your thesis committee may ask for changes which will require you to submit an amendment request to the IRB. It is advisable to get this done as soon as your advisor sees fit so you can begin your data collection ASAP.
7. The Thesis Defense	Your final thesis document must be submitted to your committee at least two weeks prior to your final defense meeting. Like your proposal document, your advisor must approve the manuscript before you defend. Action Item: Submit Thesis Oral Defense form to the graduate school at least TWO MONTHS before you defend: Click here for the form	This commonly takes places Semester 4 but some student may need more time to complete their projects.

XI. GRADUATE PSYCHOLOGY FACULTY

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XII. VSU POLICY ON THE PROHIBITION OF SEXUAL HARRASSMENT

It is the goal of Virginia State University to provide a productive and challenging educational environment, free from sexual harassment. It is the responsibility of all members of the University community to ensure that individuals are provided equal access to education, employment and services without being subjected to sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is a type of sex discrimination and is prohibited misconduct which undermines the mission of the University.

Sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors or other conduct of a sexual nature, or action taken in retaliation for reporting such behavior, when:

1. Submission to such conduct is made explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment or participation in a university-sponsored educational program or activity, or;
2. Submission to, or rejection of, such conduct by an individual is used as a basis for decisions affecting that individual's employment, academic standing or other benefits, or;
3. Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with a person's work or academic performance or creating a hostile and offensive work or learning environment.

Sexual harassment may include, but is not limited to: (1) Sexually suggestive conduct or remarks about clothing, body, or sexual activities directed personally at a member of the University community; (2) whistling in a suggestive manner directed personally at others in the University community; (3) sexual propositions, invitations, or other unwanted pressures for sexual contact; (4) obscene gestures directed personally at other members of the University community; (5) patting, pinching, or any other sexually suggestive touching or feeling; (6) attempted or actual kissing or fondling; (7) coerced sexual acts; (8) assault; and (9) expressed or implied requests for sexual favors as a condition of employment, promotion or favorable academic performance.

Virginia State University will not tolerate any conduct by any member of the University community that constitutes sexual harassment as outlined in Title VII of Sect. 703 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Virginia's Human Rights Act, or other applicable state or federal laws and regulations. Upon notification of a sexual harassment complaint, the University shall take prompt and appropriate action in response to the charge presented by the complainant. Any employee of the University being advised of a complaint of sexual harassment shall immediately refer the matter to the Human Resources Manager (EEO). All complaints under the policy should be filed within 30 days from the date of the alleged harassment. Sexual harassment will not be tolerated at VSU.

The policy on the prohibition of sexual harassment was taken from the Virginia State University Student Handbook. Please refer to the handbook for the university's policy on sexual harassment in its entirety.

XIII. APPENDIX
APPENDIX A
Thesis Research Planning Form
Department of Psychology
Virginia State University

Student's Name _____ **V#** _____

Program of Study _____ **Date** _____

1. Working title of your thesis

2. Thesis Advisor _____

Committee members

3. What progress have you made on the thesis thus far?

4. What do you expect to accomplish on your thesis this semester?

5. What is your expected date of graduation? _____

Student's Signature

Thesis Advisor's Signature

APPENDIX B.
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY
FORMAL GRADUATE GRIEVANCE FORM
DEAN OF THE COLLEGE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

This section to be completed by the student:

NAME: _____ V# _____

MAILING ADDRESS:

City: _____ State: _____ Zip _____

PHONE NUMBER: _____

E-MAIL ADDRESS: _____

DATE OF INITIAL INFORMAL GRIEVANCE: _____

PERSON(S) AGAINST WHOM GRIEVANCE IS DIRECTED:

PLEASE DESCRIBE YOUR GRIEVANCE: (Attach all supporting documents and use additional paper if necessary)

RECOMMENDATION OF THE DEAN (Completed by the Dean):

_____ Supports grievance _____ Does not support grievance

Signature of the Dean

Date

This form and the Chairperson's form must be attached to a Grievance Form sent to the Graduate School's Policies and Petition Committee.

APPENDIX C

Possible Electives (General Concentration Students)

Course Number	Name	Credits
PSYC 508	Psychotherapy I: Theories of Psychotherapy	3
PSYC 512	Human Growth & Development	3
PSYC 513	Educational Psychology	3
PSYC 514	Experimental Social Psychology	3
PSYC 515	Cognitive and Affective Psychology	3
PSYC 517	Basic Psychopathology	3
PSYC 519	Psychotherapy II: Techniques	3
PSYC 520	Psychological Assessment I	3
PSYC 521	Psychological Assessment II	3
PSYC 527	Personality Theory	3
PSYC 532	Diagnosis and Treatment of Substance Abuse	3
PSYC 533	Introduction to Neuroscience	3
PSYC 597	Teaching of Psychology	3
PSYC 598	Special Topics in Psychology	3