Mississippi State University
Cognitive Science Doctoral Program Handbook
2020-2021
Table of Contents

Core Cognitive Science Program Faculty ........................................................................... 3

Program Requirements ........................................................................................................ 3
  Course Requirements ........................................................................................................ 3

Research Requirements ....................................................................................................... 4
  Information on Committees ............................................................................................... 5
  Requirement 1. Forming a Master’s Committee and Establish First-Year Goals ............. 6
  Requirement 2. First-Year Project (FYP) Summary ......................................................... 7
  Requirement 3. First-Year Project (FYP) Talk ................................................................. 7
  Requirement 5. Master’s Thesis Defense and ACCESS talk ............................................. 9
  Requirement 6. Specialty Qualifying Exam .................................................................... 10
  Requirement 7. Dissertation Proposal (Comprehensive Exam) ....................................... 11

Other Requirements and Additional Information .............................................................. 15
  Applied Cognitive Science Research Seminar (ACCESS/brownbag) ............................. 15
  Evaluation and Status in the Program ............................................................................ 15
  Annual Reports ................................................................................................................. 16
  Department Seminars/Events .......................................................................................... 16
  Residency Requirement .................................................................................................. 16
  Outside Employment ......................................................................................................... 17
  Honor Code ....................................................................................................................... 17
  Mailing Lists ....................................................................................................................... 17
  Handling Unexpected Graduate School Issues and Extraordinary Situations ............... 17
  Students Entering with a Master’s Degree ..................................................................... 18

Social Media Policy ............................................................................................................ 18
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Program Requirements

Course Requirements
RESEARCH METHODS AND QUANTITATIVE CORE
PSY 8214 Quantitative Methods in Psychology II 4
PSY 8803 Advanced Quantitative Methods for IO and General Psychology 3
PSY 8513 Psychological Research 3

RESEARCH
PSY 9000 Dissertation Research/Dissertation in Psychology 21

COGNITIVE SCIENCE CORE
PSY 8703 Advanced Cognitive Science 3
PSY 8713 Issues and Methods in Cognitive Psychology 3

COGNITIVE SCIENCE INTEGRATION
PSY 8723 Cognitive Models of Skill 3
PSY 8773 Distributed Representations in Cognition 3

COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGY INTEGRATION
Select two of the following: 6
PSY 8743 Perception and Attention
PSY 8753 Advanced Memory
PSY 8763 Expertise and Cognitive Skill Acquisition

ADVANCED GRADUATE SEMINARS
PSY 8653 Applied Cognitive Reading Seminar 6

RESEARCH AND PROFESSIONAL SKILLS
PSY 8683 Cognitive Science Research Skills 3
PSY 8693 Advanced Cognitive Science Research Skills 3
PSY 8783 Cognitive Science Professional Skills 3
PSY 8793 Advanced Cognitive Science Professional Skills 3

COGNITIVE SCIENCE SEMINAR
PSY 8731 Applied Cognitive Science Research Seminar (ACCESS) 5

Total Hours 72
Research Requirements

The Cognitive Science program has a set of requirements designed to involve students in research upon entering the program and then facilitate their progress toward publishing their research and completing their dissertation. The purpose and evaluation criteria for these requirements are described below. Students should note that these are the minimum research requirements needed to complete the doctoral degree. Establishing a successful research career will require research products beyond the minimal set required to complete the degree. Most requirements have an associated deadline, but this is simply the latest date you can complete the requirement. You are encouraged to complete the requirements ahead of their deadlines. Some requirements have an expected completion date instead of a deadline. This expected completion date is meant as a guide to ensure satisfactory progress is being made to complete the program on time. Further distinctions between deadlines and expected completion dates are described in the section on status within the program.

The faculty cannot stress enough that students (and faculty) are often poor estimators of the time taken to produce research products. Especially as the requirements require more sophisticated writing (e.g., master’s thesis and beyond), you are encouraged to start as early as possible. It can take months of revisions to achieve the publication-quality writing needed for these later requirements. Starting your thesis writing a month (or even two months) prior to the deadline is a good indicator that you will not pass your thesis requirement. Good writing takes time and many rounds of revision in consultation with your advisor.

Unless otherwise noted or superseded by other university requirements, all written products required by the program are to be formatted as if they were being submitted for review to a journal. The default journal format will be APA format with figures/tables inline. Dissertations and theses must be formatted per APA and library guidelines.

Unless otherwise specified, you should submit all documents to satisfy requirements to your committee via email or printed copy (depending on the preference of each committee member). All forms should be filled out and signed electronically using a PDF signature. In case a form needs to be signed by the entire committee, the recommended procedure is for the student to sign the form (if required) and send to the advisor. Note that forms for recording the outcome of a proposal or defense meeting should never be handled by a student. The advisor will then circulate to the committee and obtain all signatures before forwarding to the program director. The recommended procedure is to send the document to the first committee member listed on the form and have each committee member sign in the order listed in the form before emailing it to the next committee member listed on the form. The final committee member will forward to the advisor and program director.

Failure to meet any deadlines or submit an acceptable research product for any of these requirements is grounds for a recommendation to the graduate school for dismissal from the program. Note that any deadline that falls on a weekend or university holiday is to be considered due at the same time on the next business day (e.g., if a deadline on September 15 at 5pm would fall on a Sunday, then the actual deadline for that year is the Monday following that weekend at 5pm). Unless otherwise specified or superseded by the Graduate Catalog, passing a requirement is determined by a majority vote of your committee. Note that the Graduate Catalog specifies that obtaining more than one failing vote for your master’s thesis defense, dissertation proposal, or dissertation defense constitutes failure.
Information on Committees

You will form two committees during the program. The first committee will be your master’s committee that will serve through your thesis defense. This committee must have at least three members of which at least half are cognitive science core faculty.

The second committee will be your dissertation committee that will serve from your thesis defense through completion of your dissertation defense. This committee must have at least four members of which at least half are cognitive science core faculty.

The role of the committee is to provide guidance and feedback as you progress through the degree. As such, committee members are expected to provide timely feedback on written program requirements. In addition to the general expectations of committee members described in the graduate catalog and department handbook, committee members should provide prompt feedback within 10 business days of receiving a written document during the academic year (i.e., excluding weekends, holidays, breaks, and the summer months). If a committee member is unable to meet this deadline, then he or she should notify the committee chair upon receipt of the document to develop a plan for how to proceed. You should note that most faculty are only on nine-month contracts, and so they will not necessarily be available to perform committee-related duties from May 16-August 15. You should seek prior approval from your committee if you plan to have a proposal or defense in the summer months.

Feedback from the committee on any pass/fail requirement will be first conveyed to the chair of the committee so that the final pass/fail determination can then be conveyed to the student by the chair of the committee. Committee members should submit pass/fail feedback directly to the advisor but not to the student. More detailed feedback including suggestions, revisions, and comments should be conveyed from the committee members directly to the student after the student has been notified of the overall result.

Note that committee members generally are only expected to provide feedback on the penultimate version of any document. The committee may require revisions to a document resulting in a final version or they may accept the version submitted as the final version. Committee members generally do not provide feedback or comments on intermediate drafts.

All proposals you complete in the program to submit to your committee should clearly describe what work has already been done and what you are proposing to do. If you are proposing it, then you should not do the work before your committee members have had an opportunity to review it and provide feedback. Your committee might require changes to your research, and if you have already done part of what you are proposing, you will have to repeat this work with the committee’s changes implemented.

You may switch advisors at some point in the program. You should consult with your current advisor and the program director prior to initiating any change. Switching advisors can often be difficult, and in the best-case scenario there is another faculty member who is doing research directly aligned with your new research interests who agrees to advise you. Choosing to advise a graduate student is a major decision for a faculty member, and a faculty member’s willingness to do so can depend on a number of factors. Simply because you wish to switch advisors does not mean there is a faculty member in the program who is willing to advise you. You cannot continue in the program without an advisor.
Requirement 1. Forming a Master’s Committee and Establish First-Year Goals
(Deadline: October 1 of 1st Semester)

Incoming students will generally have been admitted to work with an advisor (or possibly co-advisors), but all students will have selected an advisor within the first week of their first semester. Your advisor, along with your committee, will provide guidance throughout your time in the program.

Your advisor has the general responsibility of discussing with you all matters involving the Department and the Office of Graduate Studies. Your advisor is in a sense your primary representative to the Psychology Department, although of course you are free to consult at any time with other members of the Department, your program faculty, the Program Director, and with the Graduate Coordinator and/or Department Head. Your primary advisor must be a core member of the core Cognitive Science faculty. You may select a co-advisor who is not a member of the core Cognitive Science faculty.

In consultation with your advisor, you should establish an initial research direction for your first-year research project and subsequently your master’s thesis. Your committee members should be selected to provide additional expertise and advice on your research leading up to the thesis. Your advisor will help to identify potential faculty to serve as committee members. Your master’s committee must have at least three members including your advisor. At least half of the committee must be members of the Cognitive Science faculty.

You will need to meet with potential committee members and be able to briefly describe the area of research you will be pursuing and a possible research question. It is not expected that you will have a detailed understanding of the relevant literature or a detailed research question and hypothesis at this time. The program faculty do expect you to be able to describe the general direction you expect your research to take in the first year so that they can determine in what manner their expertise can contribute to your project.

At the end of each academic year, you will submit an annual report form to the program director. The purpose of this form is to provide information that allows the program faculty to assess each student’s progress in the program. One part of this form asks students to evaluate their progress on the annual goals they set on last year’s report. You should establish some reasonable goals with your advisor and complete only the goal setting portion of the form. These are the goals you will assess your progress towards at the end of your second semester.

You complete this requirement by filling out the M.S. Committee Request, the M.S. Program of Study, and the Annual Report forms. The first one is available from the graduate school’s website (https://www.grad.msstate.edu/sites/www.grad.msstate.edu/files/inline-files/Committee_Request_Form.pdf). The templates for your two program of study forms and the annual report form are available from the program’s section of the department website (https://www.psychology.msstate.edu/graduate/cognitive-science/forms/). A template of the Program of Study is provided on the program’s section of the department website to aid you and your advisor in completing this form. All signatures should be electronic. After obtaining all signatures, you must submit the forms via email to the program director. It is important that you keep a copy of this signed form for your records as well.
**Requirement 2. First-Year Project (FYP) Summary**

(Deadline: October 1 of 1st semester)

During the first year, you must complete a research project. The purpose of this project is to involve you in the research process as early as possible. This project will ideally form the basis for your thesis research that you pursue in your second year. Your advisor should help you to select a suitable project, and this could include assigning you to a planned study in the lab. Projects might include conducting an experiment, developing a computational model of existing data, or learning a complex methodology (e.g., fMRI) via the analysis of an existing data set. One of your goals in conducting this project should be to do something that can be built upon to lead to a publishable master’s thesis at the end of the second year. Ideally, the first-year research project leads to a publishable product, but publication of this work is not required to pass this requirement.

The goal of a doctoral program is to train you to be an independent researcher. As such, you should start to take initiative on developing and executing your project with frequent consultation with your advisor. A common mistake in graduate school is to rely on your advisor to direct the project. This is your research, and you should be taking steps to assume a leadership role in your research. You should discuss how you can best do that in the context of your particular project with your advisor.

Students work with their advisor to create a project summary. This summary is due to the program director by 5 p.m. on October 1. This summary should take the form of an extended abstract in which you address the research question underlying the work, what specifically you will be doing, and what your primary analysis will be to answer the question. The length of this summary may vary across projects but should be 1-3 pages. The cognitive science program faculty will review these summaries within 1-2 weeks. The faculty will either approve the summary, request more details, or in rare cases request revisions to the project. The program director will send an email summarizing any feedback and requests, and any requested revisions will be due within two weeks of the date this email is sent.

**Requirement 3. First-Year Project (FYP) Talk**

(Deadline: Scheduled date of your ACCESS talk during 2nd semester)

After completing your FYP research, you will prepare a talk to be presented in your second semester during ACCESS, the cognitive science brownbag. This talk should provide an overview of your project, the research question being addressed, and your results. You will schedule your talk with the instructor of ACCESS. Based on the talk, the cognitive science program faculty will either approve or fail the project. Failure of the FYP is expected to be extremely rare and reserved for cases where the research originally summarized was not completed or was not presented.

**Requirement 4. Master’s Thesis Proposal and Second-Year Brownbag Talk**

(Deadlines: Document submitted by November 15 of 3rd semester and proposal meeting completed by the end of final exams of 3rd semester)

You are required to complete a Master’s Thesis demonstrating independent research expertise. Students entering with a Master’s degree should review the “Students Entering with a Master’s Degree” section later in the handbook. Ideally, the master’s thesis will continue the line of research initiated by the FYP, which would facilitate having a publishable product at the end of
your second year. However, this is not a requirement. Although you will draw on the assistance of faculty and other university resources, the final thesis must represent your own work. Your proposal document must be submitted to your committee by November 15 and your successful proposal meeting must be completed by the last day of exams in your third semester.

You will present a talk in ACCESS at the beginning of your 3rd semester. The topic of your talk should be your thesis work. The first N ACCESS meetings of the semester will be reserved for these talks, where N is the number of second-year students in the program. The purpose of this talk is for you to describe the research question you will be addressing in your thesis including relevant motivation and background in order to get feedback from your committee before finishing your proposal document.

A thesis proposal including a review of relevant literature, a description of proposed methods, and planned analyses must be approved by your committee. As you are writing, keep in mind that your audience is your committee so that you are not writing for your specialized subfield of cognitive science. It is important that you meet with your committee members on a regular basis leading up to the preproposal meeting so that they have a clear idea of what you are going to propose prior to reading your document. Keeping your committee informed will maximize the chances that your preproposal meeting goes smoothly and can proceed as your proposal meeting. The committee should receive a copy of the proposal at least two weeks before the scheduled proposal meeting date. Evaluation criteria for the proposal document include clear writing, a clear rationale for the hypothesis grounded in prior literature, and appropriate proposed methodology and analysis techniques.

Your committee will meet at least one day prior to the proposal meeting to conduct a preproposal meeting. The purpose of the preproposal meeting is for your committee to discuss whether the written document is sufficiently developed to propose. The outcome of the preproposal meeting is a recommendation from your committee to you about whether the proposal meeting should be held as scheduled. If the committee recommends that the proposal be postponed, then feedback about necessary revisions to the document should be provided to you along with the recommendation to postpone. It is the responsibility of your advisor to communicate to you the recommendation of the committee as soon as possible after the meeting concludes. Ultimately, it is your decision to accept or reject a committee recommendation to postpone the proposal meeting. You can inform your committee that you would like to proceed with the proposal even if they recommend postponing it.

At the proposal meeting, you will start with a 15-minute overview of your thesis work followed by questions from the committee. The purpose of the proposal meeting is for you to explain and defend the proposed research described in the document. There are three possible outcomes for the meeting: pass, pass with revisions, and fail. Your advisor will communicate the outcome of the proposal to the program director as soon as possible following the meeting. There used to be a history of students providing refreshments for the attendees of the meeting, but the program has instituted a policy that prohibits students from providing food or drink. The purpose of this policy is that no student should feel compelled or burdened to provide this service.

Any revisions agreed on by the committee should be written up by you and circulated to the committee in a PDF document that is sent to the committee no later than two weeks following the proposal meeting. The committee should indicate their approval of the revisions, and then the final proposal along with any revisions should be sent to the program director. Your successful (i.e., passing) proposal meeting and the final proposal along with any revisions should be completed prior to 5pm on November 15 in your third semester.
Once you and your advisor have agreed that the master’s thesis has been completed, you may schedule a time for the defense. This defense is an oral examination, scheduled for approximately 1.5 hours during which the student offers a presentation of the research for the first 15-20 minutes. The remainder of time is reserved for questions. There used to be a history of students providing refreshments for the attendees of the meeting, but the program has instituted a policy that prohibits students from providing food or drink. The purpose of this policy is that no student should feel compelled or burdened to provide this service.

Your committee will meet at least one day prior to the defense meeting to conduct a predefense meeting. The purpose of the predefense meeting is for your committee to discuss whether the written document is sufficiently developed to defend. The outcome of the predefense meeting is a recommendation from your committee to you about whether the defense meeting should be held as scheduled. If the committee recommends that the defense be postponed, then feedback about necessary revisions to the document should be provided to you along with the recommendation to postpone. It is the responsibility of your advisor to communicate to you the recommendation of the committee as soon as possible after the meeting concludes. Ultimately, it is your decision to accept or reject a committee recommendation to postpone the defense meeting. You can inform your committee that you would like to proceed with the defense even if they recommend postponing it.

At the completion of the Master’s defense, the committee will determine whether the thesis and defense is acceptable, acceptable with revisions, or failing. You are encouraged to review the requirements of master’s thesis and defense in the department handbook and in the Graduate Catalog. Your advisor should work with the Graduate Coordinator to ensure that the appropriate paperwork is done on time. You are also encouraged to write the thesis in a manner that is appropriate for submission to a peer-reviewed journal. Evaluation criteria include publication-quality writing, clear rationale for the hypothesis grounded in prior literature, appropriate methodology and analysis techniques, and a discussion that addresses the hypothesis with respect to theories described in prior literature.

At least 3 weeks before your defense meeting, you should notify the program director and Graduate Coordinator of the date of your exam as well as send them a flyer announcing your meeting (see the program’s section of the department website for a template).

A certificate of the results (Pass/Fail/Deferred) of the defense must be completed by the committee and returned to the Office of the Graduate School via the Graduate Coordinator. Remember to review Office of the Graduate School regulations, in addition to the ones given in this handbook and the department handbook, regarding the dissertation and its submission.

If the initial defense is not successful, policies outlined in the Graduate Catalog will be followed. For example, in the 2019-2020 Graduate Catalog, a student is allowed to schedule a second defense after a period of three months has elapsed. A failure at the second defense results in a recommendation to the graduate school for dismissal from the program. Note that failing the initial master’s thesis defense does not alter any remaining deadlines for program requirements. Failing the defense meeting will result in your status in the program changing. See the section on status in the program for more details.

The defense meeting must be held on or before November 1 of your fifth semester.
You will also present an ACCESS talk in your fifth semester. The topic is up to you and your advisor. Many students will opt to present an expanded version of their defense talk.

**Submission of the Thesis.** Following the Master’s defense, students submit their completed thesis for review and signatures to the Graduate Coordinator, who will approve and send the document on to the Dean. Once the dean signs off, the student will ultimately submit the thesis electronically to the graduate school. Only final documents with full internal and external approvals should be submitted. For a copy of the guidelines and to submit an electronic Thesis or Dissertation, visit [http://lib.msstate.edu/thesis/process/](http://lib.msstate.edu/thesis/process/). You must complete the requirements for graduation with the M.S. in time to graduate the semester after you successfully defend. Relevant deadlines are set by the graduate school, dean, and graduate coordinator. Review the emails sent to you by the graduate coordinator for details.

**Graduation Requirement from Library’s Office of Thesis and Dissertation Format Review.**

Students must enroll in a free, ungraded LIB 9010 “ETD Formatting & Review” course on Canvas the semester they intend to graduate with either their M.S. or Ph.D. degree. The course is hosted by the Office of Thesis and Dissertation Format Review – you can learn more about it at [http://lib.msstate.edu/thesis/process/](http://lib.msstate.edu/thesis/process/).

**Requirement 6. Specialty Qualifying Exam**

(Dissertation committee deadline: November 15 of 5th semester)

(Deadline: April 15 of 6th semester; Retake Deadline: September 1 of 7th semester)

After submission of your thesis document for your defense, you should form a doctoral committee. The doctoral committee is comprised of at least four members of the graduate faculty. It is chosen by you in consultation with your advisor. Most members are likely to be members of the Cognitive Science Program. The committee chair (your advisor) must be a core faculty member of the Cognitive Science Program. At least half of your committee must be core faculty in the Cognitive Science Program. In addition, any rules outlined in the Graduate Catalog for committee composition must be followed. The committee should be constructed so that experts in all aspects of your study will serve as members. If changes in the approved committee become necessary, procedures described in the Graduate Catalog must be followed. Submit your complete committee request form with signatures to the program director by 5pm on November 15.

The specialty exam consists of a written review paper in the style of a *Psychological Bulletin* review article. The specialty paper is a critical literature review to help you select an appropriate dissertation research question. Please see the writing tips under the dissertation proposal topic below. The evaluation criteria are 1) that research must be integrated around a central theme, 2) must provide a critical review, and 3) suggest avenues for future research. It is very important that you have a specific scope and research question (i.e., central theme) in mind as you write this kind of review paper. Students will develop their topic with the advice and consent of the doctoral committee. A list of articles to be reviewed should be developed in cooperation with the student’s advisor and must be submitted no later than 5pm on January 5 of your sixth semester. The list should start with a 1-page summary of your paper’s topic and be organized into groups in such a way that the relevance of the readings to your topic is apparent. This list is simply a starting point and can be added to as the review paper develops. Some papers in the list may also turn out not to be as relevant as expected. It is best to consult with your committee as soon as possible if you determine that a significant departure from the initial list is necessary. While the advisor and committee are available for discussion of the ideas in
the paper, the paper should not be reviewed or edited by the committee prior to submission. The paper should be formatted in APA format as if it were being submitted to *Psychological Bulletin* and include all elements of such a paper (e.g., abstract). The exam is due by 5 p.m. on April 15 in your sixth semester. Your committee will evaluate the paper and provide feedback within two weeks. There are three possible outcomes: pass, needs revisions, and fail.

If the paper is judged to need revisions, then the committee found some aspects of the paper to be promising and expect that with significant revisions that address the committee’s feedback the paper will pass. This outcome means that the faculty have confidence that with sufficient effort you will be able to revise this paper to be acceptable. You will be allowed to revise it with a deadline of 5pm on September 1 in your seventh semester. Failure to pass the exam after the revision will result in you being placed on probation with a remediation plan requiring submission of a passing paper no later than 5pm on October 15 in your seventh semester. Failure to satisfy the remediation plan will result in a recommendation for dismissal from the program at the end of the semester.

If the paper is judged to be failing, then the faculty have significant concerns about your ability to revise this paper to become acceptable and go on to pursue your dissertation successfully. You should carefully consider your career options in consultation with your advisor, committee, and other mentors. Within two weeks of receiving this feedback, you should indicate to your advisor whether you plan to continue in the program or withdraw. If you plan to continue in the program, you will be placed on probation with a remediation plan requiring submission of a passing paper no later than 5pm on October 15 in your seventh semester. Failure to satisfy the remediation plan will result in a recommendation for dismissal from the program at the end of the semester.


(Expected completion date: Last day of classes of 8th semester)

During your 7th or 8th semester, you will present a dissertation topic talk in ACCESS. Your committee should be scheduled to meet shortly after this talk. The purpose of this talk is for you to describe the research question you will be addressing in your dissertation including relevant motivation and background in order to get feedback from your committee before writing your proposal document. You should describe the research question you plan to address in your dissertation along with any pilot work and the methods you have considered to address the question. You and your committee will then meet and discuss the topic and provide feedback to help guide you as you work continue to work on your dissertation proposal.

Supervision of the dissertation research is carried out by your dissertation advisor and your doctoral committee. Prepare a written statement of your dissertation proposal in consultation with your doctoral advisor. The length of the statement will vary with the nature of the problem, the hypotheses under investigation, the design of the research, and the proposed methods of analysis. In general, a successful proposal will include an introduction to the research question you are investigating in the dissertation including a review of relevant literature, a description of proposed methods, and planned analyses. The successful completion of the dissertation should result in a contribution to the discipline. One way of thinking about this criterion is whether completion of the work would result in at least one publication. The best studies make a scientific contribution regardless of the outcome.

Set up a proposal meeting with your doctoral committee to review the proposal and decide on any changes. This proposal meeting will constitute the Comprehensive Examination as outlined in the Graduate Catalog.

Approved August 28, 2020
At least 3 weeks before your proposal/comprehensive oral exam meeting, you should notify the program director and Graduate Coordinator of the date of your exam and send a flyer announcing your meeting (see the program’s section of the department website for a template).

At least 2 weeks before your proposal/comprehensive oral exam, you should distribute copies of the proposal to your doctoral committee.

Your committee will meet at least one day prior to the proposal meeting to conduct a preproposal meeting. The purpose of the preproposal meeting is for your committee to discuss whether the written document is sufficiently developed to propose. The outcome of the preproposal meeting is a recommendation from your committee to you about whether the proposal meeting should be held as scheduled. If the committee recommends that the proposal be postponed, then feedback about necessary revisions to the document should be provided to you along with the recommendation to postpone. It is the responsibility of your advisor to communicate to you the recommendation of the committee as soon as possible after the meeting concludes. Ultimately, it is your decision to accept or reject a committee recommendation to postpone the proposal meeting. You can inform your committee that you would like to proceed with the proposal even if they recommend postponing it.

At the proposal meeting, you will start with a 15-minute overview of your thesis work followed by questions from the committee. The purpose of the proposal meeting is for you to explain and defend the proposed research described in the document. There are three possible outcomes for the meeting: pass, pass with revisions, and fail. Your advisor will communicate the outcome of the proposal to the program director as soon as possible following the meeting. There used to be a history of students providing refreshments for the attendees of the meeting, but the program has instituted a policy that prohibits students from providing food or drink. The purpose of this policy is that no student should feel compelled or burdened to provide this service.

Any revisions agreed on by the committee should be written up by you and circulated to the committee in a PDF document that is sent to the committee no later than two weeks following the proposal meeting. The committee should indicate their approval of the revisions, and then the final proposal along with any revisions should be sent to the program director. As noted, your committee may request revisions to your proposed work, and it is therefore to your advantage not to commence the proposed research until your committee has approved your proposal and any revisions. Your committee is under no obligation to accept any proposed research you have already conducted.

The doctoral committee serves in an advisory capacity throughout the course of your research. It is convened whenever departures from the approved design are contemplated or if other special circumstances make a meeting desirable. Of course, the committee members are available for consultation and discussion as your project progresses.

A certificate of the results (Pass/Fail/Deferred) of the preliminary examination must be completed by the committee and returned to the Office of the Graduate School via the Graduate Coordinator.

**Dissertation writing tips.** Listed below are some links to resources concerned with writing a dissertation. Here is a brief summary of some key points, but you are should review these resources in detail.

- One of the most difficult sections to write effectively is often the literature review.
Your intended audience is a researcher with graduate training in psychology or cognitive science but not necessarily in your specialized subfield. You therefore need to explain the literature at the correct level of detail for that audience.

Length == Importance. The amount of space you devote to explaining a prior paper should be correlated with the importance of that particular study or theory to your research question. If you are explaining the details of a theory or experiment, then it should be critical for the development of your specific research question.

Your goal is to provide the comprehensive background as motivation for your specific research question. It is not to provide an exhaustive history of study in this field. If a study/theory does not play much of a role in your research question, question how much space to spend on it (if any).

Use figures and tables as much as appropriate.

- Experiments and Results
  - Explain the choices that you made.
  - Someone should be able to replicate your study based on your Method section.
  - Explain the rationale for your choice of analysis techniques.
  - Use acronyms sparingly and only when they enhance readability. Remember that the audience is not in your specialized subfield.
  - Use figures as much as possible.

- Discussion
  - This is perhaps one of the most crucial parts of a doctoral dissertation where you demonstrate your ability to reason about your results in relation to current theories.

- Resources
    - [http://dbem.org/Writing%20Review.pdf](http://dbem.org/Writing%20Review.pdf)


(Expected completion date: Within one year of completing the dissertation proposal)

The Dissertation Defense is held upon completion of your dissertation research and your dissertation document. The examination is administered by your doctoral committee.

At least **3 weeks** before your defense meeting, you should notify the program director and Graduate Coordinator of the date of your exam and send a flyer announcing your meeting (see the program’s section of the department website for a template). If your final program of study form has not already been approved, this request must be accompanied by your finalized Program of Study form.

At least **2 weeks** before your defense meeting, you should distribute copies of the proposal to your doctoral committee.
Your committee will meet at least one day prior to the defense meeting to conduct a predefense meeting. The purpose of the predefense meeting is for your committee to discuss whether the written document is sufficiently developed to defend. The outcome of the predefense meeting is a recommendation from your committee to you about whether the defense meeting should be held as scheduled. If the committee recommends that the defense be postponed, then feedback about necessary revisions to the document should be provided to you along with the recommendation to postpone. It is the responsibility of your advisor to communicate to you the recommendation of the committee as soon as possible after the meeting concludes. Ultimately, it is your decision to accept or reject a committee recommendation to postpone the defense meeting. You can inform your committee that you would like to proceed with the defense even if they recommend postponing it.

The meeting will start with a brief 20-minute presentation of your dissertation work followed by questions. There used to be a history of students providing refreshments for the attendees of the meeting, but the program has instituted a policy that prohibits students from providing food or drink. The purpose of this policy is that no student should feel compelled or burdened to provide this service.

If the initial defense is not successful, policies outlined in the Graduate Catalog will be followed. For example, in the 2019-2020 Graduate Catalog, a student is allowed to schedule a second defense after a period of three months has elapsed. A failure at the second defense results in a recommendation to the graduate school for dismissal from the program. Note that failing the initial master’s thesis defense does not alter any remaining deadlines for program requirements. Failing the defense meeting will result in your status in the program changing. See the section on status in the program for more details.

A certificate of the results (Pass/Fail/Deferred) of the defense must be completed by the committee and returned to the Office of the Graduate School via the Graduate Coordinator. Remember to review Office of the Graduate School regulations, in addition to the ones given in this handbook and the department handbook, regarding the dissertation and its submission. Following the defense, students must complete any requested revisions for their committee.

Submission of the Dissertation. Following the defense, students submit their completed dissertation for review and signatures to the Graduate Coordinator, who will approve and send the document on to the Dean. Once the dean signs off, the student will ultimately submit the dissertation electronically to the graduate school. Only final documents with full internal and external approvals should be submitted to the library. For a copy of the guidelines and to submit an electronic Thesis or Dissertation, visit http://lib.msstate.edu/thesis/process/. Relevant deadlines are set by the graduate school, dean, and graduate coordinator. Review the emails sent to you by the graduate coordinator for details. The submission process adds multiple weeks to the timeline, and you should plan carefully so that you graduate when you expect to.

Graduation Requirement from Library’s Office of Thesis and Dissertation Format Review. Students must enroll in a free, ungraded LIB 9010 “ETD Formatting & Review” course on Canvas the semester they intend to graduate with either their M.S. or Ph.D. degree. The course is hosted by the Office of Thesis and Dissertation Format Review – you can learn more about it at http://lib.msstate.edu/thesis/process/.
Other Requirements and Additional Information

**Applied Cognitive Science Research Seminar (ACCESS/brownbag)**

Each semester you will need to enroll in the PSY 8731 Applied Cognitive Science Research Seminar (ACCESS) or a Professional/Research Skills course but not both. The Skills courses require attending ACCESS as part of the course requirements so you should not register for ACCESS in the semesters you are enrolled in a Skills course.

ACCESS meets once a week, with presentations from program faculty, external faculty members, and students. In your second semester, you will present your first-year project proposal. In your third semester, you will present your master’s thesis topic. In your fifth semester, you will present your master’s thesis work or some other research. In your seventh or eighth semester, you will present your dissertation topic. Including these requirements, all students in the program will present at least once in ACCESS each academic year. All student presentations will be evaluated by the audience in order to provide constructive feedback on how to improve. Students will meet with their advisor or the ACCESS instructor to discuss evaluations as soon after the talk as possible. Although only 5 credit hours of PSY 8731 are required to complete the program of study, all students are required to attend and participate in ACCESS until graduation. All full-time students in the program are required to enroll in ACCESS each semester unless they are enrolled in a Skills course.

Graduate students are expected to participate in the seminar, not simply to attend. Participation includes asking questions of the presenter, participating in debates about issues, providing constructive feedback on evaluations, and making presentations. Participation is an important part of your professional training: Professional jobs often demand good speaking skills and the ability to think critically (both positively and negatively) about research. These skills will be honed through your participation in the research seminar.

**Evaluation and Status in the Program**

There are three levels of standing in the program: good standing, advisory, and probation. Good standing means that you have met all relevant requirements of the program. Advisory status is a warning status that program expectations may not be or have not been met in the anticipated time frame. University probation is defined in the Graduate Catalog and carries additional consequences including the inability to propose or defend a thesis/dissertation and potential loss of an assistantship.

Many program requirements have deadlines. Some have expected completion dates instead of deadlines. If a deadline is missed without significant extenuating circumstances (e.g., extended illness), then the student will be placed on probation. In addition, failing the Specialty Exam will result in probation. A letter will be sent to the student explaining the detailed remediation plan that must be followed to get off of probation. Failure to adhere to a probation remediation plan may result in a recommendation for dismissal from the program.

In all other cases including missing an expected completion date, the program will usually place the student advisory status and require successful completion of an advisory plan. In addition, the cognitive science faculty may decide that a student’s progress to date does not put that student on track to complete a requirement by the expected completion date. Note that there can be a number of circumstances that lead to advisory status. In some cases, the circumstances may be beyond a student’s control. The advisory plan is intended to ensure that you have a clear plan, appropriate feedback, and the tools you need to succeed.
Students who have been notified of advisory status must enroll in a PSY 7000 DIS course in the subsequent semester. The DIS course should be designed to get the student back on track in accomplishing the relevant program requirement in a timely fashion. A template for the DIS syllabus can be found on the program’s form page on the department website (https://www.psychology.msstate.edu/graduate/cognitive-science/forms/). The finalized syllabus will be submitted to the student’s committee for comments no later than 5pm on Tuesday of the first full week of classes. The committee should provide feedback within a week, and the final plan should be submitted to the program director prior to Friday at 5pm on the second full week of classes. A grade of B or lower in the DIS course will indicate failure to meet all of the plan’s requirements. In this case, the program faculty will meet and make a recommendation at the end of each semester about whether to recommend another advisory plan or whether to place the student on probation. Completion of the program requirement that triggered the advisory status will result in the student being back in good standing.

Summary of the process for submitting an advisory plan:
1. As soon as you are notified that a plan will be required for the following semester, complete the DIS form at https://www.psychology.msstate.edu/graduate/cognitive-science/forms/ and submit to Jonathan Black in the main office. This step will create the 1-hour PSY 7000 course for you to register for. Register for this course when Mr. Black notifies you that it is available.
2. Complete the DIS syllabus template and submit to your committee no later than Tuesday at 5pm of the first full week of classes for the semester. You should receive feedback from your committee within one week.
3. Submit the DIS syllabus to the program director prior to Friday at 5pm of the second full week of classes for the semester.

Annual Reports

Students will be evaluated on an annual basis by the program faculty. The purpose of this evaluation is more than simply to decide on the quality and work of each student; we also provide guidance to students as they work towards their doctoral degrees and career goals. At the faculty meeting, each student’s advisor and/or the Program Director will summarize the student’s status in the program. Faculty and other supervisors report on the student’s performance, and a consensus is reached on feedback to be given to the student.

In order to facilitate the evaluation, students are required to provide the program faculty with an Annual Report to include information concerning progress through the program. This report is due no later than April 15 each year. In addition, future goals and plans will be included in the letter. An Annual Report form is located on the program’s section of the department website. A formal guidance letter is written by the Program Director in consultation with your committee and will be sent to you. You are encouraged to meet with your advisor and/or the Program Director to discuss the feedback.

Department Seminars/Events

During the course of the year, the Psychology Department will sponsor a few seminars. All graduate students, regardless of status in the program, are expected to attend these presentations.

Residency Requirement

All doctoral students are required to remain in residence during the academic year as on-campus students throughout the program unless a leave of absence is requested and approved.
An operational definition of on-campus is that you are on campus or available to be on campus on business days while the university is open. Exceptions to this policy may be approved by the program faculty under extraordinary circumstances for a limited amount of time. If such a circumstance arises, students should discuss the circumstance with their advisor and obtain approval from the program faculty prior to accepting any position.

**Outside Employment**

Our doctoral program is a full-time program. It is expected that students will not obtain additional employment unrelated to their graduate training during the academic year. Any such employment must be approved by the program faculty, and if the student has assistantship funding, by the graduate school. If such an opportunity for employment arises, students should discuss the opportunity with their advisor and obtain approval from the program faculty prior to accepting any position.

**Honor Code**

All students are expected to be thoroughly familiar with the Mississippi State University Honor Code (www.honorcode.msstate.edu/), and University policies relating to students (www.msstate.edu/web/security/student_policies.html). Behavior inconsistent with the rules and principles set forth in these documents may result in the immediate dismissal of the student from the Psychology Graduate Program.

**Mailing Lists**

The program maintains three mailing lists: cogsci@lists.msstate.edu, cogsci-program@lists.msstate.edu, and cogsci-jobs@lists.msstate.edu. The cogsci list is for the general community who may be interested in talks and brownbags and includes all program faculty and students as well as others on campus. The cogsci-program list is only for program faculty and students and is intended for program-wide announcements. The cogsci-jobs list is intended for senior students who will be looking for positions. Faculty and students who are members of the jobs list can forward relevant job ads to the list for distribution.

**Handling Unexpected Graduate School Issues and Extraordinary Situations**

For any problems that arise related to the program, your advisor, your committee, or anything related to your graduate career at the university, please do not hesitate to get in contact with someone to help work through the problem. Within the department, you could consult with the program faculty including the program director, the graduate coordinator, or the department head. We encourage you to consult one of us as soon as possible to find a way to deal with the issue. If appropriate, we encourage you to attempt to rectify the situation within the department whenever possible.

Outside of the department, you can consult with the dean of students to find the appropriate channel to handle the problem. Please consult Academic Operating Policy (AOP) 12.37 for more details about graduate student grievances at https://www.policies.msstate.edu/policypdfs/1237.pdf

The policies and procedures described in this handbook are intended to cover the vast majority of anticipated circumstances. In exceptional situations, you are encouraged to discuss your situation with your advisor and the program director. The program faculty will review and handle rare exceptions to these policies on a case-by-case basis.
Students Entering with a Master’s Degree

In some cases, students entering with a thesis-based master’s degree can petition the core program faculty for credit for their prior coursework and master’s thesis. Each case will be handled on a case-by-case basis, and each petition will be decided by a majority vote of the core program faculty. You should submit prior syllabi including course topics and readings for each course that you are petitioning to receive credit for. Work with your advisor to determine which course you are petitioning to waive from our curriculum.

In cases where a significant amount of coursework can be waived, students can also petition to waive the master’s thesis requirement. For example, if you have sufficient coursework that is similar to our program’s curriculum (e.g., four courses) then you could consider waiving the master’s thesis requirement. Our research requirements described below assume that you are dual-enrolled in the Psychology Master’s degree. Waiving the master’s thesis is equivalent to waiving the second year of program requirements, and your expected program completion time would be four years. Petition forms for coursework and waiving the master’s requirement are available from the program’s section of the department website.

Social Media Policy

In an increasingly technologically connected and public world, students are encouraged to remain mindful of your behavior and its consequences online, including the use of personal website, social networking, blogs, listservs, and email. It is likely that future employers may be interested in searching or accessing online information about you. Although all of the information that may exist about you may not be within your control, students are urged to exercise caution and restraint and to utilize privacy safeguards when possible. Activities online, including those that you may consider purely personal in nature, may unfortunately reflect upon your professional life. With this in mind, you are encouraged to consider the following cautions and suggestions:

With social networking sites such as Facebook, utilize privacy settings to limit access to your pages and personal information. Online photo and video sharing, including within social networking sites, should be considered very public venues; use discretion when posting such information. With email, keep in mind that everything you write may exist perpetually or be retrievable, so be thoughtful about what you write. Emails sent via the MSU email system are considered public records and the property of MSU. Participation in listservs and forums include the peril of inadvertently writing things to a much more public audience than intended, so be cautious with posts to such forums. Email is not an appropriate venue to discuss confidential information, so if such communications are necessary make sure any information is non-identifiable.

It is not the intention of the program to interfere in your personal life or to limit your ability to enjoy the benefits of online activities, express your personality or opinions, or have a little fun. However, as with off-line activity, we encourage you to be mindful of the implications and make efforts to protect your professional image and reputation. Where your connection to MSU is apparent, make it clear that you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of MSU. If the program becomes aware of online activity that represents a violation of university policies; the APA Code of Ethics; or local, state, or federal laws, such information may be included in evaluation of student progress and may be grounds for disciplinary action, including dismissal from the program.
Overview of Cognitive Science Program Requirements and Deadlines

- All deadlines assume starting program in a fall semester – in case of rare exceptions to this assumption, see program director

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Milestone</th>
<th>Deadline/Expected Completion Date</th>
<th>Form/Completion Requirement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First Year</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisor selected</td>
<td>End of first week of classes</td>
<td>Reply to email from program director (only sent if necessary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s committee formed and first-year goals</td>
<td>Oct. 1</td>
<td>Committee Form Program of study (M.S.) Program of study (Ph.D.) Goals section of annual report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FYP proposal summary</td>
<td>Oct. 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FYP talk</td>
<td>Brownbag talk schedule in second semester</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual review</td>
<td>April 15</td>
<td>Annual review form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Second Year</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis topic talk</td>
<td>Brownbag talk scheduled early in 3rd semester</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s thesis proposal</td>
<td>Document due Nov. 15 of 3rd semester Successful proposal meeting by end of exams of 3rd semester</td>
<td>Proposal due to committee two weeks prior to proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual review</td>
<td>April 15</td>
<td>Annual review form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Third Year</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s thesis defense</td>
<td>Defense held prior to Nov. 1*</td>
<td>Thesis document due two weeks prior to defense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral committee formed</td>
<td>Nov. 15 – This may be prior to your thesis defense</td>
<td>Doctoral committee form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialty exam reading list</td>
<td>Jan. 5</td>
<td>Reading list sent to committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis submitted to library</td>
<td>In time to graduate with MS in spring semester</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual review</td>
<td>April 15</td>
<td>Annual review form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialty exam</td>
<td>April 15</td>
<td>Specialty paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fourth Year</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation topic talk</td>
<td>Fall or early spring semester</td>
<td>Annual review form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual review</td>
<td>April 15</td>
<td>Annual review form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation proposal</td>
<td>Final day of classes in spring semester*</td>
<td>Proposal Exam Results Form Admission to Candidacy Form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fifth Year</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual review</td>
<td>April 15</td>
<td>Annual review form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACCESS presentation</td>
<td>Required annually</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation defense</td>
<td>Final day of classes in spring semester*</td>
<td>Dissertation Exam Results Form</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = advance notice required, please read full description of milestone
Sample Schedule of Classes
This is a planned sequence of courses that is subject to change. It is included here to provide a guideline for what you should plan to register for each semester. Always consult with your advisor prior to registering each semester. You should always register for 13 hours of course work each semester.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students entering in odd years (e.g., 2019)</th>
<th>Students entering in even years (e.g., 2018)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First year – Fall</td>
<td>First year – Fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. QM II</td>
<td>1. QM II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Research Methods</td>
<td>2. Research Methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Thesis hours (3)</td>
<td>4. Thesis hours (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First year – Spring</td>
<td>First year – Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Issues/Methods</td>
<td>1. Advanced Cognitive Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. ACCESS</td>
<td>2. ACCESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. QM III</td>
<td>3. QM III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Thesis hours (6)</td>
<td>4. Thesis hours (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second year – Fall</td>
<td>Second year – Fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Reading seminar A</td>
<td>1. Reading Seminar B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Thesis hours (4)</td>
<td>4. Thesis hours (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second year – Spring</td>
<td>Second year – Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Advanced Cognitive Topic A</td>
<td>1. Issues/Methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. ACCESS</td>
<td>3. ACCESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Thesis hours (6)</td>
<td>4. Thesis hours (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third year – Fall</td>
<td>Third year – Fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Reading Seminar B</td>
<td>1. Reading seminar A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. ACCESS</td>
<td>3. ACCESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Thesis hours (6)</td>
<td>4. Thesis hours (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third year – Spring</td>
<td>Third year – Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Cog Models Distributed</td>
<td>1. Advanced Cognitive Topic A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Dissertation hours (7)</td>
<td>3. Dissertation hours (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth year – Fall</td>
<td>Fourth year – Fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. ACCESS</td>
<td>1. ACCESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Dissertation hours (12)</td>
<td>2. Dissertation hours (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth year – Spring</td>
<td>Fourth year – Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Advanced Research Skills</td>
<td>1. Advanced Professional Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Dissertation hours (10)</td>
<td>2. Dissertation hours (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth year – Fall</td>
<td>Fifth year – Fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. ACCESS</td>
<td>1. ACCESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Dissertation hours (12)</td>
<td>2. Dissertation hours (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth year – Spring</td>
<td>Fifth year – Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. ACCESS</td>
<td>1. ACCESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Dissertation hours (12)</td>
<td>2. Dissertation hours (12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>