

**Psychology Department
2-4 Report**

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The Psychology Department decided to use the 2-4 Initiative to review its entire set of graduate requirements. There was consensus that these requirements had changed in a piecemeal fashion over the last several years, and as a result, there were inconsistencies and unclear passages in the requirements. In addition, we felt it was time to review the substance of the requirements to determine if changes needed to be made.

A Graduate Requirements Committee was formed. It was chaired by Prof. Brian Scholl, and included Profs. Will Corbin, Valerie Purdie-Vaughns, and Susan Nolen-Hoeksema. The committee met several times over the fall to discuss the requirements and needed changes. We surveyed graduate students via email for suggestions for changes in the graduate requirements, and then met with the graduate students in an open forum to discuss their feedback and suggestions for changes. We solicited written feedback from faculty members. Then we discussed proposed changes in detail at a series of three faculty meetings and voted on changes.

At the end of this process, the following changes in the graduate requirements were voted in by the faculty:

1. Institute a new first-year research paper requirement.

Previously, new students were not required to submit a research paper until the end of their second year. This paper, which reported original research conducted by the student, has been known as the Pre-dissertation. There was concern among the faculty that not having a written report of research from students until the end of the second year allowed for too much time to pass before faculty could fully evaluate a student's progress in research.

Thus, we have instituted a new first-year research paper requirement. This paper will be due at the end of each student's second semester of the first year. This paper can potentially qualify as the student's pre-dissertation requirement if the student has completed her/his research project. However, it is recognized that not all forms of research can be accomplished in one year, so for some students, this first year research paper will be a report of progress to date on their research. Then the student will be expected to complete her/his research by the end of the second year and hand in the Pre-dissertation Paper at that time.

2. Eliminate the first and second year theme statements.

The DGS recently instituted new yearly progress reports for all students in the graduate program, making the previous theme statements for first and second year students redundant. It was thought that the new progress reports provide a more detailed and structured system of reporting progress for students than the old theme statements. Thus, the theme statements have been eliminated. Note that part of the new progress report system includes structured feedback from the faculty mentors of students in response to their progress reports.

3. Eliminate the dissertation area paper, while expanding the scope of the dissertation prospectus.

Previously, students were required to submit a Dissertation Area Paper sometime before submitting their Dissertation Prospectus. This Dissertation Area Paper was intended to require students to write a comprehensive review of the literature relevant to their dissertation. However, the distinctions between the Dissertation Area Paper, the Theme Essay students write in their third year, and the Dissertation Prospectus were unclear to students and faculty alike. It was decided that the Dissertation Area Paper was redundant and unnecessary, and thus, it has been eliminated. The graduate requirements will now specify, however, that the version of the Dissertation Prospectus handed into the student's dissertation committee should include a thorough review of the research literature establishing the rationale for the proposed dissertation research.

4. Recharacterize the committee meetings evaluating the completed dissertation, instituting a public oral defense of the dissertation.

Previously, students who had completed their dissertation research and writing initially defended their written dissertation to their "5-person committee" in one meeting, then sometime after that (often within a few weeks) defended any changes made to the dissertation to the same committee in a meeting called the "defense meeting." In practice, almost all the work of the committee happened in the 5-person meeting, and frequently, the defense meeting was anti-climatic. Further, students had no "capstone" experience at the end of the dissertation.

In the revised requirements, students will still defend their dissertation research and written dissertation to their 5-person committee. This will be a closed meeting of the committee and student, and will focus on changes that need to be made to the dissertation to make it acceptable for approval. However, once a student has made these changes, and the changes have been approved by her/his advisor (and often by the other committee members in individual conferences), the student will present a public, oral defense of the dissertation. This oral defense will be widely announced and will be open to all faculty, students, and friends and family members of the student. The student will give a brief overview presentation of the research. The committee members will each then have an opportunity to ask questions. The audience may then ask questions. The committee will then meet in private to determine the outcome of the meeting (i.e., approval/disapproval of the dissertation),

while the student is out of the room. The committee will then announce its decision to the student. It is expected, however, that a student will not be allowed to have her/his oral defense until it is essentially certain that he/she will pass this defense.

These changes will be implemented beginning in the 2007-2008 academic year. The faculty will evaluate the changes and make adjustments at the end of that period.