

Psychology Department Thesis Policy

The following thesis policies are for departmental use only. They are not meant to supplant or contradict any Graduate School procedures. In any areas of conflict, Graduate School procedures must be followed.

Expectations for a Thesis:

It is expected that a master's thesis in the Psychology Department at Marshall University will reflect a significant original research project. Except in unusual situations where a committee might approve a significant review of the literature or theoretical, effort it is expected that most theses will involve actual data collection and analysis. It is further expected that the work will reflect an individual effort. While it is possible that more than one graduate student could cooperate on gathering data for some complex study or study involving an unusual population with which it would be difficult or wasteful of resources to work separately, normally students will collect their own data. In situations where graduate students have been given permission by their respective committees to work together on data collection, each thesis must reflect a study of a different aspect of the data and an evaluation of a different hypothesis. Writing by each student must reflect their own approach to the topic. The thesis cannot be written jointly.

Theses are to be written in current APA form, following all rules so that except where there is a conflict with graduate school guidelines the thesis would be essentially ready for submission to an APA sponsored journal. Theses are also to be written in standard academically acceptable English, i.e., be free of sentence fragments, punctuation errors, spelling errors, and other subjective evidence of lack of care. Thesis research must also conform to all APA and Marshall University regulations and procedures for the treatment of research participants. A completed thesis must contain a signature page following the title page. This signature page must include the typed names of the committee members and the signatures of all committee members. The typed name(s) of the chair person(s) must be listed first and must be followed by the title (Chair) or (Co-Chair).

Student's First Step: Finding a Committee Chair

Students are responsible for selecting a thesis committee chair. The committee chair is a role distinct from that of the student's academic advisor, although the same person can fill both roles. Students are encouraged to talk to several faculty members about their research interests prior to selecting a chair. The thesis chair must be a tenure track, full-time member of the psychology faculty and a full member of the Graduate faculty. In cases where a faculty member who does not meet these criteria is more knowledgeable about or interested in the student's area of interest, this faculty member may serve as a "co-chair" of the committee. However, this does not limit the responsibility of the psychology department co-chair for overseeing the thesis process.

Duties of the Thesis Chair

In agreeing to serve as thesis chair, the faculty member is agreeing to supervise and facilitate all aspects of the student's research and writing of the thesis. This includes having responsibility to proof read the thesis and return for correction any thesis containing obvious spelling, grammatical and punctuation errors. The chair is also responsible for verifying that the research is conducted in accord with all applicable APA and University ethical standards and procedures.

Thesis committee:

In addition, to the committee chair a thesis committee shall consist of at least two additional members. These committee members must also have Graduate Faculty status (associate or full). At least one of these committee members must also be a member of the Psychology Department. If a student would like the expertise on the committee from someone else the committee can be expanded beyond three members. However, the committee chair or at least one of the co-chairs must be a full time psychology department member, and at least 50% of the committee must always be from the psychology department. If the committee is expanded beyond three members, with the approval of the other committee members, the fourth committee member need not have graduate faculty status at Marshall or Psychology Department membership.

In consultation with his/her thesis committee chair, the student is responsible for creating the full committee by obtaining the agreement of these members. To ensure sufficient time for all committee members to respond to and provide support for the developing thesis project, this committee should be formed as early in the thesis process as possible. The committee must be formed prior to the thesis proposal meeting.

Thesis committee membership may be changed informally at any time prior to the prospectus meeting (e.g. a faculty member may resign and/or the student may ask different faculty to serve as thesis chair or as thesis committee members with no formal process needed). After the prospectus meeting, however, the department chair must approve thesis committee changes. A thesis committee form, which includes the names and signatures of committee members, should be placed in the student's file after the prospectus meeting and prospectus approval.

The Prospectus

A thesis prospectus is a document designed to fully describe the proposed research project. Written in APA style, it includes a literature review, research questions, hypotheses (if such are appropriate) a proposed methodology and references. A well-developed proposal is essentially the first two chapters of the thesis. Such a proposal, once agreed to by the committee, should require little additional work by the student, who could then be expected to concentrate on data collection, analysis and writing of results and discussion.

When the committee chair and student agree that the proposal is

developed enough to circulate to committee members, a proposal meeting is scheduled. The student is responsible for contacting committee members and arranging an agreeable time. Students may, of course, ask for input and other help from committee members at any time in the thesis process. The proposal, however, must be given to committee members so as to allow adequate time to read and respond to the document. It is professional courtesy and commonsense to allow committee members at least two weeks to review a proposal (or subsequent drafts of the thesis) before a proposal meeting (or final thesis defense).

Faculty have varied schedules and responsibilities during summer months, and often are not working for the university during part, or all of the summer semesters. Students should not expect to schedule proposal meetings or theses defense meetings during the summer months unless these meetings have been approved, in advance (during the prior academic year) by all committee members.

The proposal meeting typically includes a brief oral presentation of the proposed research by the student and an opportunity for committee members to offer critique and ask questions. At the conclusion of the meeting, the committee chair will indicate to the student if: a) the committee endorses the research plan and b) if the next stage of the process can begin. Other than full endorsement, the committee may elect to require changes in the research plan, a rewrite of part or all of the proposal or the committee may reject the proposal. Upon successful completion of the proposal, a copy containing the signature of all committee members should be placed in the student's file.

Full approval of the proposal includes approval of the research methodology and of the specific data, which will need to be collected. Barring unusual and extenuating circumstances, it is not permissible for committee members or the committee chair to require alteration of the methods or the collection of additional data at a later time. Any exceptions to this policy must be approved in writing by the department chair.

In most cases, data collection should not begin unless the proposal has been fully approved by the committee. Any exceptions to this policy (e.g. the thesis project is part of a larger, ongoing research project for which data collection has already begun) must be fully explained and agreed to by all committee members.

Thesis Defense

When the student and committee chair agree that the final thesis is sufficiently developed, copies are given to all committee members, and a date for the thesis defense is established. The student is responsible for setting a date and time agreeable to all committee members. In consultation with the committee chair, students may invite other interested observers to the final defense. Students must observe all applicable Graduate School rules and dates regarding completion of the thesis. As noted above, committee members should have adequate time to review the thesis prior to the defense.

The defense format is typically similar to that of the proposal

meeting. At the end of the meeting, and after consulting with the committee, the chair will inform the student of the committee's decision regarding the thesis. Possible outcomes include full approval, requirements for editing and/or rewriting parts of the thesis, requiring a major rewrite of the thesis, scheduling a continuation of the thesis defense at a later time or requiring a completely new thesis defense meeting.

Full approval of the thesis by the committee is indicated by the signatures of committee members and the committee chair on the signature page. When the thesis is fully approved, a copy of the signature page should be put in the student's file.

Graduate Dean

The Graduate School Dean must be notified, in advance, of all thesis defenses, and s/he must also approve and sign all theses. Copies of the final committee-approved thesis must be sent to the Graduate Dean in accordance with Graduate School requirements for typing paper quality, etc. and electronic submission.