

University of Georgia - Department of Psychology
Social, Developmental, and Health Psychology Area
Graduate Program Document

(Version: 8/31/26)

I. Program Purpose

The doctoral program in Social, Developmental, and Health Psychology prepares students for research-intensive careers in academic, policy, industry, and other professional settings. The program emphasizes rigorous, context-sensitive science by encouraging students to consider variation across populations, critically evaluate the generalizability of research findings, and design studies that produce knowledge relevant to the communities they seek to understand. Students complete the requirements for the Master of Science degree and then advance to doctoral training leading to the Doctor of Philosophy degree.

Training follows an apprenticeship model. Students work closely with a faculty advisor while developing increasing independence in research, writing, teaching, and professional development.

Topics of Study in Social, Developmental, and Health Psychology

Faculty and students in this area study a range of topics, such as:

- Social relationships and peer processes
- Personality and individual differences
- Family and caregiving environments
- Risk and resilience across development
- Stress and coping
- Cognitive development
- Health behaviors and health disparities
- Emotion regulation and self-regulation
- Psychobiological processes
- Sociocultural influences
- Psychology of prejudice and oppression

Training is tailored to each student's research area while maintaining shared methodological and conceptual foundations.

This document supplements the Psychology Department Graduate Studies Policy Manual. In the event of conflict, Graduate School and departmental policies prevail. Students are responsible for knowing and meeting all Graduate School, departmental, and program requirements.

II. Mentorship and Advisory Committees

Major Professor

Graduate training proceeds through close mentorship. Students enter the program with a primary faculty advisor who must be a member of the Graduate Faculty. The advisor supervises research training, thesis and dissertation development, and professional development.

Although the major professor serves as the student's primary mentor, students are encouraged to seek additional mentorship and collaborative opportunities with other faculty whose expertise aligns with their research interests and professional goals. These opportunities should be developed in consultation with the student's primary advisor.

If a student wishes to change advisors, the student should consult with the current advisor, the program chair, and the Director of Graduate Studies.

Advisory Committees

Advisory committees guide course planning, evaluate research milestones, and conduct required examinations.

Committee membership is determined collaboratively by the student and the advisor and must be approved by the Director of Graduate Studies and the Graduate School.

Master's Advisory Committee

- Minimum of three members, all of whom must have Graduate Faculty status; minimum of one faculty member from the SDH area (typically the primary mentor)
- Named during the first year of study
- Approves the Master's Program of Study
- Evaluates the Master's Thesis and conducts the Oral Defense

The committee must convene for the Master's Oral Defense.

Doctoral Advisory Committee

- Minimum of three members of the Graduate Faculty; at least one faculty member from the SDH area
- Approves the doctoral Program of Study
- Conducts the Written and Oral Comprehensive Examinations
- Approves the Dissertation Prospectus
- Evaluates the Dissertation and conducts the Final Oral Defense

Students meet with the doctoral committee prior to beginning comprehensive examinations to review coursework, research progress, and timeline.

III. Program of Study

A Program of Study specifies the coursework and research hours required for degree completion. The requirements are specified in the sections below. The Program is developed in consultation with the advisor and approved by the advisory committee, the Graduate Coordinator, and the Graduate School.

Students must maintain a 3.0 graduate grade point average. No course with a grade below B- may be included on the Program of Study.

Required Courses: Students are expected to take at least two courses that cover foundational principles in social, developmental, or health psychology. These courses can be housed in other departments (e.g., HDFS, Public Health) and should be selected in consultation with and approved by the student's advisory committee. Note: courses need to be from two distinct areas or sub-disciplines (e.g., PSYC 6200 Advanced Social Psychology + HDFS 6100 Theories of Development).

IV. Proseminar

All students enroll in the weekly Proseminar (PSYC 9100; 1 credit each semester) each fall and spring semester throughout their graduate enrollment.

The Proseminar includes:

- Student research presentations
- Professional development

- Teaching development
- Exposure to external speakers
- Career development programming

Students give research presentations during training:

- Second year (short presentation based on first-year research; ~10 minutes)
- Third year (extended research talk; ~25 minutes)
- Fourth or fifth year (job talk-length presentation; ~45 minutes)

Proseminar credits count toward degree requirements.

MASTER OF SCIENCE DEGREE

V. Master's Degree Requirements

Students are expected to complete the Master of Science degree en route to the doctorate. Students can request to waive this requirement if they enter the program with a thesis-based Masters degree (see below under "Waiving the Master's Degree Requirement"). Students should consult the Graduate School Policies page for up-to-date information about University requirements: <https://grad.uga.edu/graduate-policies/>

Credit Requirements

Minimum of 30 total hours:

Research (9 hours):

- 6 hours of Master's Research (PSYC 7000)
- 3 hours of Thesis Writing (PSYC 7300)

Coursework (21 hours):

- GradFirst class (GRSC 7001; read more about GradFirst here: <https://grad.uga.edu/gradfirst/about-gradfirst/>)
- Graduate Teaching Seminar (GRSC 7770; required by the Graduate School for teaching and research assistants)
- Two quantitative or research design courses (or approved equivalents)

- One course addressing sociocultural influences on behavior, development, and/or health
- Proseminar credits (PSYC 9100; typically 4 hours acquired in Years 1-2)
- Additional 6000–8000 level graduate courses
 - Two courses should cover foundational concepts in at least two of the three areas represented in the SDH program (e.g., PSYC 6200 Advanced Social Psychology, PSYC 6220 Developmental Psychology)

Course selections are made in consultation with the advisor.

Master's Thesis

The Master's Thesis is an independent empirical research project conducted under the direction of the advisor.

Written Thesis

- Approved by the advisor before distribution to the committee
- Committee members are given two weeks to review
- At least two members must agree the document is ready for defense

Oral Defense

- Public presentation (generally around 30 minutes) followed by a private examination
- All committee members attend simultaneously
- Pass requires no more than one dissenting vote

Upon successful completion, students advance to doctoral training.

Note: Students are expected to complete their Master's Thesis and other requirements by July 15th of their third year. (Students are strongly encouraged to defend their thesis prior to May 31st given that faculty schedules are highly variable during the summer months.) Students should discuss any concerns about meeting this deadline with their advisor.

Waiving the Master's Degree Requirement

Students entering the SDH graduate program with a master's degree in psychology (or a related field, such as neuroscience) from another institution may request an exemption from the requirement to complete the Master of Science in psychology at UGA en route to the doctoral degree.

Requesting the Exemption

- The incoming student should submit the request for exemption to their major professor and the SDH Area Head as soon as possible, and prior to the start of their first semester at UGA.
- Approval requires agreement from both the major professor and the SDH Area Head.
- If questions arise regarding whether the master's degree earned elsewhere is equivalent to the Master of Science in Psychology at UGA, the Area Head may, at their discretion, convene an ad hoc committee to review the request.
- Committee review of the request should include confirmation that all expectations of a UGA-awarded master's degree are met by the student's prior work, including adequate coursework, written thesis, and oral defense of the thesis. Students who are lacking a limited number of these factors (e.g., all components except an oral defense) may be given the opportunity to complete the remaining elements as a condition of waiving the master's degree requirement.
- If the exemption is approved, the major professor must communicate the approval to the Department of Psychology's Director of Graduate Studies and Graduate Program Administrator prior to the start of the incoming student's first semester at UGA.

Coursework Required Despite the Waiver

Students whose Master's degree requirement has been waived must still complete the following courses at UGA:

- GradFirst class (GRSC 7001; read more about GradFirst here: <https://grad.uga.edu/gradfirst/about-gradfirst/>)
- Graduate Teaching Seminar (GRSC 7770; required by the Graduate School for teaching and research assistants)
- Two quantitative or research design courses (or approved equivalents)
- One course addressing sociocultural influences on behavior, development, and/or health
- Proseminar credits (PSYC 9100; typically 4 hours acquired in Years 1-2)
- Two courses at the 6000–8000 level that cover foundational concepts in at least two of the three areas represented in the SDH program

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY DEGREE

VI. Doctoral Degree Requirements

Doctoral requirements are in addition to the Master's degree.

Awarding of the doctoral degree requires:

1. Completion of required coursework and research hours.
2. Successful Written Comprehensive Examination.
3. Successful Oral Comprehensive Examination.
4. Approval of the Dissertation Prospectus.
5. Approval and Defense of the Dissertation.

Credit Requirements

Minimum of 30 additional doctoral hours:

Research (12 hours):

- Doctoral Research (PSYC 9000)
- 3 hours of Dissertation Writing (PSYC 9300)

Coursework (18 hours):

- 8000–9000 level graduate courses
- One advanced methods, quantitative, or laboratory course
- Proseminar credits (required every semester)
- Additional advanced electives

VII. Written Comprehensive Examination

The Written Comprehensive Examination assesses scholarly depth and readiness for independent research. The written comprehensive examination is completed by the student working independently, without any assistance from the advisor, committee, or fellow students. Students select one of the following options in consultation with their advisor and committee:

Option 1: Structured Essay Examination

A closed-book examination completed over three days. Students will have up to 6 hours per day to respond to the essay questions assigned for a given day. Essay questions will be written by the student's Doctoral Advisory Committee, and will be based on the reading list provided by the committee members. Questions will be designed to assess breadth and depth of knowledge. Typically, the essay questions assigned on the first day will broadly cover core knowledge in Social, Developmental, and Health Psychology. The second day's questions will focus on methodological and statistical expertise, and the final day's questions will be focused on the student's specific subarea of expertise. All DAC members will submit questions, and the major professor will organize the questions according to the themes for each test day.

Students will have the option of answering the questions either on paper, or on a computer that has internet access disabled. No access to internet-connected devices will be allowed during the examination period each day.

Option 2: Comprehensive Scholarly Manuscript

An independent review article or meta-analysis suitable for submission to a peer-reviewed journal (for example, Developmental Review or Psych Bulletin). The manuscript must reflect the student's independent scholarship. Generally, manuscripts are 30+ pages in length and reflect new ideas and/or integration of existing literature that advances the field in a meaningful way.

Option 3: Grant Proposal

A full research proposal modeled after a federal grant mechanism. The proposal must demonstrate theoretical grounding, methodological rigor, and feasibility. Currently approved mechanisms: F31, F99/K00, R21, R03, R36; additional mechanisms, such as post-doc funding mechanisms and foundation awards, can be considered and would require approval from the student's advisory committee and SDH program chair.

Evaluation

Each submission is evaluated as:

- Pass
- Conditional Pass (revision required; materials will be reviewed again by the committee)
- Fail

Students who receive a Conditional Pass have three months to address revisions and submit to their committee for further consideration. Students who fail their comprehensive exams may

be permitted one additional attempt, as determined by the committee. A second failure results in dismissal from the program.

VIII. Oral Comprehensive Examination

After passing the written examination, the student completes an Oral Comprehensive Examination, which is structured as a question-and-answer format. This meeting will last two hours and will be conducted by the student's Doctoral Advisory Committee. The first hour of the exam will focus on questions related to the written comprehensive examination document. The second hour of the exam will focus on questions derived from the SDH Comprehensive Exam Reading List. Students should carefully read all articles on the reading list and be prepared to answer questions related to these foundational articles. Students will receive an initial set of questions 30 minutes before the oral exam. During this period, students will not have access to resources but will be able to take paper/pencil notes to prepare for the discussion. Additional follow-up questions not on the original list may emerge as a result of the student's answers.

Students' performance during the Oral Exam will be evaluated as Pass or Fail. Two failures will result in dismissal from the program.

IX. Dissertation Prospectus

The Dissertation Prospectus is a formal proposal describing the planned dissertation research, including background, rationale, and methodology.

- Written document distributed at least two weeks prior to the oral meeting.
- Oral defense with committee.
- Approval constitutes agreement that the proposed project is appropriate for the doctoral degree.

Prospectus document: The length and organization of the prospectus will vary depending on the nature, scope, and methodology of the proposed dissertation. Rather than meeting a fixed page requirement, the document should provide the committee with sufficient information to evaluate the significance, feasibility, and methodological rigor of the project. In consultation with the major professor, students should determine the level of detail appropriate for their project.

The prospectus should generally include:

- A statement of the problem, purpose, or central research question(s);
- Relevant theoretical, conceptual, and/or empirical background;
- A clear description of the proposed methodology, including data sources, participants or materials, procedures, measures, and analytic approach, as applicable;
- The anticipated scope and structure of the dissertation;
- A discussion of the project's potential contributions; and
- A plan for completing the work, including anticipated next steps and a timeline.

At the prospectus defense, the committee evaluates the proposed research and may recommend revisions to its scope, design, or execution. Approval of the prospectus indicates that the committee agrees that the proposed plan is appropriate and sufficiently developed for the student to proceed. The prospectus serves as an approved research plan rather than an unalterable contract; projects may evolve as the research progresses. Substantial changes to the approved plan should be discussed with the student's major professor and, when appropriate, the full committee.

Students can choose between two dissertation options:

Traditional Dissertation: A traditional dissertation presents a unified work of original scholarship organized into chapters. It will generally include an Introduction/Background chapter that establishes the purpose, significance, and relevant literature; a Methods chapter describing the research design and analytic approach; a Results chapter presenting the findings; and a Discussion chapter addressing the study's implications, contributions, and limitations.

A traditional dissertation may include one study or multiple related studies, provided that the chapters collectively address a coherent set of research questions or aims. Unlike a staple dissertation (see below), its chapters are not written as independent manuscripts. The precise organization and scope may vary according to the project's methodology and should be determined in consultation with the student's major professor and committee.

Staple Dissertation: With approval from the dissertation committee, students may complete a manuscript-based ("staple") dissertation. A staple dissertation consists of three thematically related manuscripts. These manuscripts **cannot** be products that were used as part of other departmental milestones (e.g., master's thesis, meta-analysis written as part of written comps). The student must be the first author on all three manuscripts, and the work must be completed while enrolled as a graduate student at UGA.

The staple dissertation should also include an integrative introduction (approximately 4–5 pages) and a concluding discussion (approximately 4–5 pages) that synthesizes the manuscripts, articulates their overarching contributions, and situates the work within the broader literature.

At least two of the manuscripts should be published or submitted for publication at the time of the dissertation defense.

X. Dissertation and Final Defense

The Dissertation is written under the direction of the advisor and approved by the committee before defense.

- Committee members are given at least two weeks to review.
- The Final Oral Defense consists of a public presentation followed by a private examination.
- Pass requires no more than one dissenting vote from the committee.

Students must adhere to all Graduate School formatting and submission deadlines.

XI. Professional Conduct and Academic Integrity

Students are expected to:

- Adhere to the University Academic Honesty Policy
- Demonstrate professional behavior in research, teaching, and service
- Meet program milestones in a timely manner
- Maintain clear communication with advisors and committee members

Failure to meet academic or professional standards may result in probation or dismissal consistent with Graduate School policy.

Statement on the use of Artificial Intelligence

During their first year in the program, students should meet with their advisor to discuss when and how the use of artificial intelligence (AI) is appropriate.

- Major professors and students are encouraged to document agreed-upon parameters for AI use in writing.
- AI should not be used to generate content for examinations, theses, or dissertations, which must reflect the student's own thinking, ideas, and scholarly work. For other activities, students should consult with their advisor to establish clear expectations.

- Any use of AI in written work must be disclosed transparently. Because strong independent writing skills are essential to graduate training, students are encouraged to develop these skills without relying on AI. Students are also encouraged to remain informed about evolving journal policies, including requirements for disclosure and restrictions on AI use.

XII. Annual Evaluations

Each spring, students and their major professors will complete an annual evaluation of the student's progress in the program. Students and mentors will independently assess the student's performance in research, coursework and professional engagement, progress toward degree milestones, and service to the program, department, profession, or community. They will then meet to discuss their ratings, address meaningful discrepancies, and develop a specific set of goals and an action plan for the coming year. The evaluation should encourage candid and realistic reflection not only on whether the student is meeting program expectations, but also on whether the student's developing record of scholarship, teaching, professional experience, and service will make them competitive for the career path they intend to pursue. Expectations should be calibrated to the student's year in the program, professional goals, and agreed-upon timeline for degree completion.

Students and mentors are encouraged (but not required) to schedule informal fall "check in" meetings to create 3-5 measurable goals for the year.

Sample Five-Year Timeline

The timeline below illustrates a typical progression through the SDH graduate program. Individual students' timelines may vary depending on prior training, research progress, career goals, funding, and other factors.

Year 1

- Join a faculty mentor's research lab.
- Develop and begin a first-year research project.
- Complete required coursework, including GradFirst and GRSC 7770.
- Get involved in projects, data collection, and professional development activities.
- Begin presenting research at regional or national conferences, as appropriate.

Year 2

- Present first-year research project in SDH Proseminar.
- Complete remaining required MS coursework.
- Complete and defend the master's thesis.
- Continue developing an independent program of research.
- Submit manuscripts for publication and present at national conferences.

Year 3

- Complete any remaining post-MS coursework.
- Continue research (e.g., conference presentations, manuscript submissions).
- Begin work on the written comprehensive examination.

Year 4

- Take additional classes (as needed to complete credits or as interests align)
- Complete the written and oral comprehensive examinations.
- Develop and defend the dissertation prospectus.
- Continue disseminating research through presentations and publications.

Year 5

- Complete dissertation research and writing.
- Defend the dissertation.
- Submit dissertation manuscripts for publication, as appropriate.
- Apply for postdoctoral positions, academic appointments, or other career opportunities.