

Psychological Sciences Doctoral Program  
Guidelines for the Completion of Qualifying Theses and Dissertations

The Psychological Sciences Faculty would like to clarify expectations for student progress toward completion of the Qualifying Thesis, Dissertation Proposal, and Final Dissertation. Below are deadlines for submission of theses and dissertations, organized by year of the program. We offer two sets of guidelines: one for completing the degree within four years and one for completing the degree within five years. In addition, we outline both student and faculty responsibilities for qualifying theses and dissertations.

#### **Four Year Guidelines**

Funding is guaranteed for only four years (8 long semesters). TA support beyond four years requires a special request to the Graduate Studies Committee and normally is approved only when it is clear that the student has made good progress and is nearing completion of the degree. To help students who wish to complete their work during the 4-year funding period, the table below outlines a timeline for completion of program requirements.

#### **4-Year Timetable**

##### **First year:**

**By February 1:** Qualifying Thesis Committee selected

Two-three page Qualifying Thesis pre-proposal submitted to Qualifying Thesis Committee  
Committee membership form and pre-proposal submitted to Academic Support Coordinator

**By August 1:** Full draft of Qualifying Thesis Proposal submitted to Qualifying Thesis Committee

##### **Second year:**

**By September 15:** Qualifying Thesis Proposal defended by student and approved by Qualifying Thesis Committee

Proposal approval form and proposal submitted to Academic Support Coordinator

**By December 15:** Progress Report on Qualifying Thesis submitted to Qualifying Thesis Committee and Academic Support Coordinator

**By March 20:** Final, full draft of Qualifying Thesis submitted to Qualifying Thesis Committee

**By May 1:** Qualifying Thesis defended by student and approved by Qualifying Thesis Committee

**By end of spring semester:** Qualifying Thesis presented at “brown bag” meeting

Public presentation form, Qualifying Thesis final approval form, and Qualifying Thesis submitted to Academic Support Coordinator

##### **Third year:**

**By September 15:** Dissertation Committee selected

Dissertation prospectus submitted to Dissertation Committee

Submit signed Committee Appointment Form and Dissertation Prospectus to Academic Support Coordinator

**By February 15:** Full draft of Dissertation Proposal submitted to Dissertation Committee

**By April 1:** Preliminary meeting with the Dissertation Committee held

**By April 15:** Submit copy of dissertation proposal and Dissertation Proposal Approval form to Academic Support Coordinator and schedule dissertation proposal defense

**By May 1:** Dissertation Proposal defended

Submit Dissertation Proposal Public Presentation form to Academic Support Coordinator

##### **Fourth year:**

**By September 15:** Progress report submitted to Dissertation Committee and Academic Support Coordinator

**By January 15:** Final, full draft of the Dissertation submitted to Dissertation Committee

**By March 15:** Final Dissertation approved and defense scheduled

Submit Request for Final Oral Exam form and dissertation copies to Graduate Dean’s office and Academic Support Coordinator by published deadlines in the UTD Academic Calendar

## Five Year Guidelines

Students are strictly required to complete the doctoral degree within a maximum of five years (please note the funding is only guaranteed for the first four years). The timetable below lays out a timeline for completion of degree requirements within the maximum of five years.

## 5-Year Timetable

### First year:

**By February 1:** Qualifying Thesis Committee selected

Two-three page Qualifying Thesis pre-proposal submitted to Qualifying Thesis Committee  
Committee membership form and pre-proposal submitted to Academic Support Coordinator

**By August 1:** Full draft of Qualifying Thesis Proposal submitted to Qualifying Thesis Committee

### Second year:

**By October 1:** Qualifying Thesis Proposal defended by student and approved by Qualifying Thesis Committee

Proposal approval form and proposal submitted to Academic Support Coordinator

**By February 1:** Progress Report on Qualifying Thesis submitted to Qualifying Thesis Committee and Academic Support Coordinator

**By August 1:** Final, full draft of Qualifying Thesis submitted to Qualifying Thesis Committee

### Third Year:

**By October 1:** Qualifying Thesis defended by student and approved by Qualifying Thesis Committee

**By end of fall semester:** Qualifying Thesis presented at “brown bag” meeting

Public presentation form, Qualifying Thesis final approval form, and Qualifying Thesis submitted to Academic Support Coordinator

**By February 1:** Dissertation Committee selected

Dissertation prospectus submitted to Dissertation Committee

Submit signed Committee Appointment Form and Dissertation Prospectus to Academic Support Coordinator

### Fourth Year:

**By September 15:** Full draft of Dissertation Proposal submitted to Dissertation Committee

**By November 1:** Preliminary meeting with the Dissertation Committee held

**By January 15:** Submit copy of dissertation proposal and Dissertation Proposal Approval form to Academic Support Coordinator and schedule dissertation proposal defense

**By February 1:** Dissertation Proposal defended

Submit Dissertation Proposal Public Presentation form to Academic Support Coordinator

### Fifth Year:

**By September 15:** Progress report submitted to Dissertation Committee and Academic Support Coordinator

**By January 15:** Final, full draft of the Dissertation submitted to Dissertation Committee

**By March 15:** Final Dissertation approved and defense scheduled

Submit Request for Final Oral Exam form and dissertation copies to Graduate Dean’s office and Academic Support Coordinator by published deadlines in the UTD Academic Calendar

Note that the Office of Graduate Education publishes deadline dates for requesting the final oral exam, final dissertation defenses and submission of final copies of the dissertation document. These can be found at

<https://graduate.utdallas.edu>.

## **Qualification Plans**

Qualification Plan 1 involves completing a Qualifying Thesis in journal article format, incorporating an introduction with a literature review, precise description of methods, statistical data analysis, and interpretation. Completion of the Qualifying Plan 1 is strongly recommended for most students in Psychological Sciences.

Qualification Plan 2 involves completing a first year research project in journal article format and in addition, a comprehensive literature review. Psychological Sciences students should consult with their Research Advisor and Program Head if they are considering Qualification Plan 2 to design a timetable for completion within the four year funding period or the maximum five years allowed to complete the degree.

## **Format for Qualifying Thesis Prospectus**

The document should be 2 pages in length and designed to inform the faculty of the basic questions and issues to be addressed by the Qualifying Thesis. The prospectus is not a fully formed proposal. The document serves the function of providing faculty with information needed to make decisions about whether they have appropriate expertise and are willing to serve on the committee.

## **Qualifying Thesis**

The Qualifying Thesis will be modeled after a journal article (discuss with your advisor and committee which journals would be the most appropriate models for your research area). If the format differs from that of a traditional psychology publication, the student should inform the committee of the particular journal format/model for the paper. Note that the introduction for the Qualifying Thesis proposal is often more comprehensive than the introduction for the final Qualifying Thesis, as the proposal's purpose is to set up and justify the study.

## **Dissertation**

The Dissertation will also be modeled after a journal article (see information about the Qualifying Thesis above). However, the dissertation should reflect greater depth of understanding and mastery of knowledge of research in your area than the Qualifying Thesis. It is acceptable to present a series of publishable manuscripts with a discussion tying these manuscripts together as a fulfillment of the dissertation requirement, but students should work closely with their advisors and committees to ensure that this is done satisfactorily.

## **Student Responsibilities**

Students are responsible for submitting theses and dissertations in advance of each deadline; the deadline dates outlined above are for final versions of papers. In order to make these deadlines, students need to begin working with their advisors very early during each phase to develop their research ideas and prepare their papers. Students should think carefully about and discuss with their advisors the time required for writing their documents as well as the time that is necessary for faculty to review and provide feedback during development of the thesis and dissertation.

Students will work hard to make the document as strong and polished as possible before submitting to the faculty advisor for review. Students will work in consultation with advisors to make the thesis or dissertation as strong and polished as possible before submitting it to the full committee. Thesis and dissertation documents should be labeled clearly both in the filename and on the cover page with the student's name, the name of the document being submitted, and the date (for example, Underwood-Prospectus of Qualifying Thesis-2-1-12 or Spence-Final Dissertation-4-1-12). Any revision of a thesis or dissertation should be accompanied with a detailed resubmission letter (modeled after a journal review response letter) that responds to all committee suggestions, point by point, explaining either how the document was revised in response or why the student did not make the suggested change. Students will ask that advisors review all thesis documents and resubmission letters carefully before these are sent to the full committee. Theses and dissertations may only be submitted to committee members when the university is in session. Students may not submit theses or dissertations to committee members in the week preceding a university holiday or break; breaks are ideal times for students to work on making theses and dissertations stronger. Students may submit documents to the faculty advisor before or during breaks at the advisor's discretion.

**Qualifying Thesis:** For the Qualifying Thesis, the public presentation of the research (usually presented in the Developmental, Cognitive and Social/Personality (DCS) series) cannot be scheduled without approval by the full committee. Students can choose to hold their thesis defense immediately following the public presentation, but all committee members must agree to this. The student will be considered to be a candidate for the doctoral degree as

soon as the written version of the Qualifying Thesis has been approved by the committee, although the Brown Bag presentation may happen later.

**Dissertation Proposal:** For the dissertation proposal, after the student has provided the committee with a full draft of the proposal, at least one preliminary meeting must be held prior to the scheduling of the formal proposal defense. The purpose of the preliminary meeting will be for the faculty committee to share feedback with the student. Practice talks for the proposal defense are not held with the committee but will take place in other venues (for example, presented to lab groups in advance of the formal proposal defense).

### **Faculty Responsibilities**

Faculty members, both advisors and committee members, are responsible for providing prompt, constructive, specific feedback to students on their theses and dissertations. Faculty will provide feedback on student theses and dissertations within two weeks of receiving the document.

Faculty advisers will work with students to make a thesis or dissertation as strong and polished as it can be before the document is submitted to the full committee. Faculty advisers will review all resubmission letters and theses/dissertations before these are sent to other committee members. At each stage of review, advisors will try to respond to student work as promptly as possible, but always within two weeks of the student submitting the document.

Committee members will provide prompt, constructive feedback to students in writing and will share this feedback with the faculty adviser and with other committee members. Committee members will keep in mind the type of feedback that is appropriate at each stage (simply agreeing to serve or not when presented with the prospectus, with more detailed guidance as the project moves toward completion). At each stage of review, committee members will try to respond to student work as promptly as possible, but always within two weeks of the student submitting the document.

Before agreeing to serve on a student's Qualifying Thesis or Dissertation Committee, faculty members should consider carefully whether they are able to fulfill these responsibilities. If they cannot, they should decline to join the student's committee and suggest alternatives. Faculty should only serve as on as many committees as they can while meeting these expectations.

### **Consequences of Failing to Meet These Deadlines**

Students who do not submit documents by each deadline outlined above are required to provide an explanation to the entire committee, and to request an extension. The extension request should be sent to the entire committee and the Program Head should be copied. The extension request must include a target date by which the document will be submitted. Students who persistently fail to meet deadlines will be considered not in good standing, lose funding, and risk being dismissed from the program.

### **Advantages of Following These Guidelines**

The Psychological Sciences faculty has proposed these guidelines to facilitate students' progress toward the completion of their doctoral degrees in the period of time for which the university can provide funding (typically four years). Students adhering to all of these deadlines will have the highest priority for funding, both in the long semesters and in the summers. Students adhering to all of these deadlines will be the highest priority for opportunities to teach their own courses in the summer. Students adhering to these deadlines will be eligible for nomination for honors such as the Redeker Award, and other external awards and fellowships. Most importantly, students who adhere to these guidelines will gain the skills in writing and revising research papers that are required to launch and maintain an active research program and an academic career.