

Social Psychology  
Graduate Program  
Student Handbook

Department of Psychology  
University of Utah

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# I. Purpose

This handbook is intended to provide a description of the requirements and expectations for successful completion of the Masters and Ph.D. in social psychology. It supplements the Graduate Student Handbook provided by the Department of Psychology. The social faculty wishes to communicate one overarching message with this document: Each requirement has specific learning objectives and these objectives are best served if the tasks are made as clear and circumscribed as possible. *Students should discuss any questions they have concerning the guidelines and procedures described in this handbook with their advisors and/or the social area coordinator.*

## II. Course Work

### A. Basic Courses

There is a core set of courses that provide a basic foundation in general psychology, social psychology, statistics, and methodology. The graduate core courses and statistics sequence described in the Department Handbook form a major component of this foundation. Students should note that the social area requires that the three departmentally required core courses must be completed within 30 months of matriculation, or prior to conferral of the Master's degree. Students may petition the area to postpone one core course until after the Master's degree is completed if the postponement facilitates the students' educational goals. It is suggested that students spread the core courses over that time rather than attempting to complete all three in the first year or three semesters of study. It is strongly recommended, however, that students take Psychology 6410, Advanced Social Psychology (a Core Area III requirement) or Psychology 6450, Personality Theory and Research (a Core Area IV requirement), during their first year. Social area students ultimately are required to take both Psychology 6410 and 6450 to fulfill Core Area III and IV course requirements. These courses are offered usually in alternating years.

During their first year in the program, social students are required to take Psychology 6420, Methods in Social Psychology. In addition to the year long statistics and psychological measurement series (Psychology 6500 and 6510, Quantitative Methods I and II) also taken during the first year, social students are required to take one advanced statistics course prior to completion of their Ph.D. This advanced statistics course may be one offered by the Psychology Department, or a course offered in another department (e.g., Educational Psychology). If you choose the latter option, be sure you have the approval of your advisor and the area coordinator. It is recommended that the advanced statistics course be taken after the Masters is completed.

### B. Social Research Group

Students are also required to register for and participate in Psychology 6890, "Social Research Group," each semester (excluding summer) that they are enrolled in the program. Social Research

Group typically meets on alternating weeks. Two students are elected each year by fellow students to coordinate the research group, in consultation with the social area coordinator. These students are responsible for contacting and scheduling potential presenters outside of the area and department (based on their own suggestions as well as those generated by other students and faculty), scheduling presenters from within the social area, and scheduling any meetings that do not involve presenters (e.g., discussions of professional issues). All first year students are required to present their initial ideas for a master's thesis project at a research group meeting during the Spring semester of their first year. In general, all students are strongly encouraged to present during at least one research group meeting per year. These presentations can range from very informal to formal formats, and involve feedback on research ideas and/or completed projects, test runs for master's or dissertation defenses, and practice conference presentations or job talks.

To facilitate cross-area discussion and collaboration, the first research group meeting of the academic year is typically a poster session held in the 8<sup>th</sup> floor hallway. Faculty and students from Developmental, Health, and Social areas, in particular, are encouraged to present posters from conferences attended in the previous year.

### C. Seminars

Seminars are viewed by the faculty as a major venue for scholarly exchange and as essential to graduate training. Social area seminars are identified as falling under one of three categories: Social Influence, Social Relations, and Social Thinking. Graduate students are required to take one semester-length seminar from each of these three categories prior to completion of the Ph.D. Although only three seminars are required, it is the policy of the area to expect students to take most of the seminars offered. Thus, the number of required seminars should be considered the minimal number of seminars completed. These required seminars should be supplemented with other seminars or other work within or outside the social area, in accord with the student's educational plan as discussed and approved with his/her primary advisor.

Active participation in seminar discussions is expected, although grades themselves are de-emphasized. In most cases, first-year graduate students do not enroll in these seminars.

## III. Preliminary Examination

### A. Introduction

As part of the requirements to receive a Ph.D., students in the social psychology program are required to pass a comprehensive examination in social psychology. The purpose of the Preliminary Examination is to have the student acquire a broad but critical understanding of social psychology. The exam has three components. The first is the general social psychology exam taken during the Spring semester of the student's 3<sup>rd</sup> year in the program (see below). Students who have not completed their MA thesis by this point in time in principle, will not be allowed to take the

preliminary exams that year. However, students may petition the social area faculty for special permission to take the exam. This is most appropriate when the student is close to finishing the MA thesis. Students are advised to meet with their mentor and other social area faculty about expected performance and other general questions regarding the preliminary exam. It is also useful to discuss with your mentor how best to maintain ongoing research and other professional activities while preparing and taking the preliminary exam. The second requirement for the social area preliminary exam is the independent teaching of Psychology 3410 (Introductory Social Psychology), typically taught during the third year. In the final portion of the exam, students will construct a reading list in their proposed area of expertise (i.e., Ph.D. project) to be approved by the student's dissertation committee. During the Ph.D. proposal defense, the student may be asked questions related to both the proposal and this reading list.

## B. Exam Schedule

The general component of the exam will be taken around the spring break of the Spring semester in the student's third year of enrollment. The exam will be scheduled on a weekday, usually Friday. The scheduled day will be arranged in advance by mutual arrangement of the third-year students and the social area coordinator. The exam will be postponed only under unusual health or other circumstances. The social area faculty must approve a postponement greater than 48 hours.

If a student misses a scheduled exam (or refuses to take it) for reasons not approved by the social area faculty, the student will be considered as having failed the exam.

## C. Length and Structure of Exam Sessions

During the general component of the exam, students will receive over two sessions 7 integrative questions regarding the field of Social Psychology. Students are advised to broadly review the major areas represented on the reading list (see below) and seek advice from their mentors, social area chair, or other faculty on how best to prepare more broadly. At the time of the first session, students will receive 4 of the 7 integrative questions and can answer any 3 of the 4 during a four-hour sit down session on campus. Students are encouraged to type their answers on a computer. Once the first session is completed, students will receive the three remaining questions, and be given seven days to answer 2 of the 3 as a take-home exam. Responses to these take home questions will be limited to 10 pages or less (excluding the reference page), double-spaced at 12-point font. Faculty will be given two weeks to grade the general exam following completion of the take-home portion. It is expected that the student will orally defend their exam within a week of receiving feedback of a successful written performance.

## D. Reading Lists

The reading list is meant to be a major guide to important readings and areas of inquiry in social psychology. However, questions may also be asked from social area courses (the area secretary will maintain a copy of reading lists from current courses), and more recent work appearing in major

journals. The reading list will be provided to new graduate students during their first semester of enrollment (usually during the orientation meeting with the social area coordinator). This reading list may be updated each year for the new incoming class.

#### E. Procedure for Compiling the Content of the Exams

Compilation of the general component of the exam will be the responsibility of the social area coordinator. The area coordinator will ask each member of the social faculty to submit draft questions to be included in the exam. These questions will be based on the general reading list, related material covered in courses, or emerging issues in the social psychological literature.

#### F. Grading the Written Exam

For the general exam, social area faculty will submit their grades for the written component of the examination to the social area coordinator within two weeks after the take-home portion is completed. Students' responses to questions in both sessions will be graded along each of the following dimensions: overall, breadth, depth, integration, and critical analysis (1=Unacceptable, 2=Poor, 3=Acceptable, 4=Good, 5=Very good, 6=Excellent). These dimensions reflect the aspects of training and rigor that are central for a Ph.D. in Social Psychology and should be used as general guides for students as they construct their responses. A single dimension score will be computed for each question, averaging across faculty on the each dimension. Average scores of "3" are considered a passing mark on the written portion of the exam. In order to schedule an oral follow-up exam, the graduate student needs to average a "pass" on the "Overall" dimension for the combined questions. The area coordinator compiles the grades from the individual faculty members. Faculty members should not give formal or informal feedback to students concerning their exams before all the grades have been collected and discussed by the faculty.

Preliminary exam questions usually require breadth, integrative and conceptual discussion, and evaluation of theories and research. Therefore, students who are preparing for the exam should not only familiarize themselves with the various content areas, but should also be prepared to criticize, extrapolate, and integrate across this body of theory and research. The faculty are concerned not only with evaluating the student's knowledge of published research and theory but also with the student's critical and conceptual skills. These latter skills are viewed as essential prerequisites for the Ph.D. and a successful career as a psychologist. Essays should be clearly written, should directly and thoroughly address the question, and should reflect both breadth and depth of knowledge about the social psychological literature. The social area secretary will maintain a file of successful preliminary exam performances.

Once individual faculty grades are received and compiled, the social area faculty discuss the grades and decide whether a student is eligible to take the follow-up oral exam. If the exam performance is poor, and the social faculty judge that an oral follow-up is unlikely to reverse evaluations of the student's written performance, then the oral follow-up is canceled. If, on the other hand, the written performance is viewed as satisfactory, or the oral exam is needed to clarify uncertain evaluations of the written exam, then the oral follow-up will go forward.

## G. Oral Follow-up to the Exam

An oral follow-up meeting will be scheduled on a weekday within two weeks after the grading is completed. The meeting will last no more than one hour. During the first ten minutes, the graduate student will present additions or clarifications to his or her written exam answers (this is an opportunity for the student to demonstrate his/her ability to critically evaluate his/her own work in terms of completeness, clarity, and conceptual rigor). The remaining time will be used by the social faculty to present questions to the student concerning the student's exam answers and to provide feedback on the written exam. Immediately following this meeting, the social area faculty will recommend a pass or fail, and any remedial activities (e.g., writing exercise in a substantive area) that may be necessary. In these discussions, the written exam is the major basis of evaluation that is then adjusted for the student's performance in the oral examination.

For the general exam, in addition to immediate verbal feedback to the student provided by the advisor and area coordinator, brief written feedback is provided and inserted in the student's folder within a week of the orals (see sample in Appendix A).

A student who fails his/her first exam must request permission to reschedule a second written and oral exam. For students continuing in the program, the second exam will be taken during the following semester. Failure of the second examination usually will be grounds for termination from the graduate program.

## H. Teaching Requirement

As part of the preliminary examination, all students are required to teach independently Psychology 3410, Introduction to Social Psychology. This class is taught usually during the third year. Typically, students will first TA the course (i.e., attend lectures, participate in class discussions) in order to familiarize him /herself with course materials. The semester in which it is taught is to be arranged with the student's advisor and social area coordinator at the time of curriculum planning for that year. Typically, this planning will be done in the Spring semester of the student's second year of enrollment. The student is responsible for all aspects of development of the course including textbook selection, exam preparation, and course requirements. However, the student should consult with his or her advisor concerning teaching plans and questions. The student's advisor will be responsible for supervising this experience, including the possibility of observing one or more lectures and providing feedback to the student on teaching content, style, syllabus, exams, and assignments.

# IV. Master's Thesis

The social area has designated that the master's thesis defense is to be completed by the end of the Fall semester of the student's 3<sup>rd</sup> year in the program. Students are strongly encouraged to adhere to the following timeline: Appoint committee at the beginning of Spring semester of the first year;

have a preliminary proposal idea to present to the social area research group by the end of the Spring semester of the first year; hold colloquium in Fall semester of the second year; hold defense by the end of the Fall semester of third year. The purpose of the master's project is to provide students with experience in all phases of the design, execution, analysis, interpretation, and communication of research. Thus, it is essential that projects be manageable within the time frame provided by the area. The social area faculty believes that the learning objectives of the master's requirement can best be met by performing a research project that is part of the advisor's ongoing research program. It is neither necessary nor desirable to design projects that are completely independent of the advisor's research, or that are broad in scope. The important criteria are that master's projects be well designed, competently executed and ask and answer a clearly stated question.

## V. Research Project with Second Faculty Member

Students are also required to complete a project with a faculty member other than their major advisor. (Note that this is in addition to the requirements for the Master's thesis project described in the departmental and area handbooks.) This project should culminate in a written product by the end of the student's third year in the program. This project could include writing a review or theoretical paper with another faculty member, conducting an applied research project with the faculty member teaching the service learning research project class, or conducting a basic or applied research project with a faculty member. The timetable for this work should be as follows:

1. By beginning of Fall term of the student's second year, the student should identify the second faculty member with whom they will be working. Thus, the student is expected to spend part of the first year and the summer between the first and second years meeting with different faculty members and discussing possible plans.
2. During the student's second year, she or he is expected to complete the majority of the "collection" phase of the work (whether that means collecting new data, reanalyzing old data, exhaustively reviewing a literature, etc.).
3. As soon as possible, but no later than the end of the student's third year, the project should result in a written product with the student as a first or later author. It is hoped and expected that this written product will be presented at a professional conference and ultimately submitted for publication. This product will be part of the data that the area faculty take into account when they make decisions about students' admittance into candidacy for the doctoral degree. (This decision is made after students have completed the requirements for the Master's degree, which is expected to occur 30 months after students are admitted into the graduate program. If students have completed the requirements for the Master's degree prior to completing this written product with a second faculty member, admission to doctoral candidacy may be made contingent on the subsequent completion of this written product.) The faculty member serving as the advisor for this project will submit a letter to the area faculty noting whether and when this project has been satisfactorily completed and listing the reference to the written product(s). Copies of this letter will be given to the student and inserted in the student's file. (See sample in Appendix B).

The goal of this requirement is to structure within the program the kinds of experiences that will benefit the students the most in light of current job markets. The social area faculty must approve any changes in the procedure or timing of this project. Changes are only likely to be approved when the student is in good standing and the changes still fulfill the intentions of the requirement.

## VI. Dissertation

The Ph.D. dissertation is to be done after the student completes the preliminary examination and thesis defense. In contrast to the master's thesis, the dissertation project reflects the student's independent and original scientific contribution. The dissertation committee includes five faculty members. It should be formed as soon as the master's is submitted. According to graduate school requirements, at least one member of the committee should be from outside of the psychology department.

## VII. Research Expectations

*The conduct of research should be given high priority.* Students should be actively involved in research at *all* stages of their graduate training. This involvement is in addition to the formally required master's and dissertation projects, and the project with a second faculty member. Although much of the student's research activity will be with his or her advisor, collaborative projects with other faculty and students are strongly encouraged and supported. Extensive research and writing experience in graduate school is excellent preparation for one's professional life. In addition, a student needs to have completed, written up, and published several research projects to be viable on both the academic and applied job markets. Because students do not typically take courses during the summer, the summer is an excellent time to concentrate on writing up research projects to submit for publication. It is strongly recommended, therefore, that students complete formal degree requirements (e.g., master's and dissertation colloquia or defenses) during the regular school year. *In addition, most faculty are on 9-month appointments and are not paid for work over the summer. They therefore also typically prioritize research-related activities for the summer.* As a result, students may find it difficult to schedule meetings with faculty for the formal teaching-related activities of colloquia and defenses during the summer. Students are thus more likely to optimize their research profile by keeping summers as clear as possible of other requirements in order to make research-related activities (with faculty, other students, or alone) a priority.

## VIII. Evaluations

Formal evaluations of student performance are conducted twice each year. A mid-year student evaluation is conducted in December, and an end-of-year evaluation is conducted in April or May. Social area faculty meetings to evaluate graduate student performance are preceded by individual meetings between faculty and their advisees. At the beginning of each evaluation

meeting, a student representative (e.g., social student rep on the Graduate Committee) is able to present general issues or concerns that social students have for the area and department. After the student rep leaves, the overall performance of the students are discussed and evaluated. Each student's status in the program is also discussed. Formal evaluation letters are provided to each student at the end of each school year. In some cases, letters are provided to students after the mid-year evaluation.

It should be noted that these semi-annual student evaluations are based on a student's overall performance, including teaching, research, coursework, preliminary exams, and service. Productivity, skills, and potential in all of these areas are considered. Pre-master's students whose performance is unsatisfactory may be offered the opportunity to obtain a terminal master's degree. Advancement to Ph.D. candidacy is contingent on the faculty's overall evaluation of a student's productivity, skills, and potential; the simple completion of minimum requirements for the master's does not automatically lead to admission to doctoral candidacy.

If a student wishes to appeal the recommendations and/or decisions of the supervisory committee, the area, or the department, several levels of appeals are possible and should be pursued in the following order. These guidelines are provided from the *University of Utah Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities* (Please see the Psychology Department Handbook for more detail on these points). To summarize, students should (a) meet the academic requirements of a course, (b) meet the academic requirements of the program, (c) adhere to generally accepted standards of academic honesty, and (d) adhere to the professional and ethical standards of the discipline for which the student is preparing.

- A. The University encourages the informal resolution of problems. Students are urged to informally discuss the problem with the involved faculty member(s), area faculty, graduate chair, department chair, dean of the college, and/or dean of students. If no informal solution can be found, then formal procedures for the resolution of the problem are detailed below. The academic action can be formally overturned only if it is judged to have been arbitrary or capricious.
- B. The first formal level of appeals is to the chair of the department. This appeal needs to be filed within 40 working days of notification of the original academic action. The chair, at his/her discretion, may then ask that the departmental Graduate Committee hear the appeal. It is most helpful if the student writes a petition to the departmental chair, outlining the reasons why she or he believes the recommendation/decision should be reconsidered. The role of the Graduate Committee, in this context, primarily involves insuring that the area followed proper procedures when the recommendations and/or decisions were made. Within 15 working days of the notification by the student, the chair will notify the student and faculty involved in writing of his or her decision. If either student or faculty members disagrees with the Chair's decision, they have 15 working days to appeal to the Academic Appeals Committee (see below).
- C. The next level of appeals is to the Academic Appeals Committee. Procedures for this appeal

are outlined in the *University of Utah Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities* (see Departmental Handbook).

## IX. Applied Research and/or Work Experience

Students are encouraged to obtain applied research experiences in the local community, other parts of the university, or in collaboration with faculty in the social or other doctoral programs. Such experiences can be useful educationally, add to one's experience as a professional, and may offer grant-funded support and/or career options. Students should seek out such experiences on their own and with their advisor's and other faculty members' advice. Before committing to specific opportunities, students should consult with their advisor and the area coordinator to insure that the experience is a worthwhile one that is compatible with their full participation in the social psychology program. Work conducted outside of the Department should be regarded as a supplement to, but not a substitute for, social psychology research conducted under the direct supervision of area faculty.

## X. Professional Standards and Ethics

Graduate students are expected to adhere to the ethical principles of psychologists in all domains of their professional career, including the roles of student, researcher, & instructor. A statement of the Ethical Principles of Psychologists is given to each graduate student upon matriculation. It is the responsibility of each student to be familiar with the content of this statement of Ethical Principles, to maintain awareness as the principles are changed or clarified by the APA, and to consult with his/her advisor and/or the Professional Issues and Ethics Committee should a potentially problematic situation arise. This document is also available in *American Psychologist* (December, 1992), and is included in the departmental handbook; students are urged to read this document in its entirety. Some of the issues most relevant to graduate student training in social psychology are discussed below. Students also need to be aware that violation of the Ethical Principles of Psychologists is considered to be academic misconduct, and may lead to dismissal from the program. For additional information on University-wide policies for academic conduct and behavior, consult the *University of Utah Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities*, or contact a member of the Professional Issues and Ethics Committee (see Departmental Handbook),

### **Authorship**

The Department adheres to APA ethical guidelines regarding authorship (see Department Graduate Handbook). Students are encouraged to discuss authorship responsibilities *early in the research process* and as needed as *involvement shifts* across the duration of projects. Order of authorship should reflect the degree of responsibility for creating and writing a manuscript, and ongoing discussions should help clarify these roles and responsibilities.

### **Sexual Harassment/Dual-role Relationships**

Graduate students assume a variety of roles during professional training, some of which are

subordinate in nature and some of which entail influence and responsibility over others. It is important that students be aware of both their rights and their responsibilities with respect to issues of sexual harassment and dual-role relationships. Any students with questions or concerns about these issues should discuss them with the Department Chair, the Director of Graduate Studies, or a trusted faculty member, with the assurance that strict confidentiality will be maintained.

Issues pertaining to sexual harassment are covered in section 1.11 and issues of dual relationships are covered in sections 1.17 and 1.19.

With respect to dual relationships, section 1.19 states:

Psychologists do not exploit persons over whom they have supervisory, evaluative, or other authority such as students, supervisees, employees, research participants, and clients or patients (a).

Psychologists do not engage in sexual relationships with students or supervisees in training over whom the psychologist has evaluative or direct authority, because such relationships are so likely to impair judgment or be exploitative.

The Psychology Department endorses these principles and considers that they apply to faculty, graduate students and undergraduates in positions of responsibility over others in the department.

The University policy prohibiting sexual harassment states:

Sexual harassment is an unlawful employment practice, and is contrary to the University's equal opportunity and nondiscrimination policy.

Unwelcomed sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other sexually degrading verbal or physical conduct constitutes sexual harassment. Courteous, mutually respectful, non-coercive interaction between two people that is acceptable to both parties is not considered to be sexual harassment. University policy requires that all employees and students share the responsibility for assuring that sexual harassment does not take place, and that the working and educational environment of the University is not sexually intimidating, hostile, or offensive to individuals on campus.

Anyone who feels that there has been a violation of this policy has the right, and is encouraged, to discuss their complaint with the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action. That office can also provide additional information about what types of behavior constitute sexual harassment.

### **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism consists of any attempt to present as one's own the ideas or work of another. The department considers such behavior unethical and unprofessional. Evidence of plagiarism should be reported to the department's Graduate Committee and/or the University Student Behavior Committee. In many cases, however, it is perfectly acceptable for students to form study groups or work together in preparing for exams. Students should consult with the course instructor if they are

uncertain about the acceptability of such study groups.

### **Confidentiality**

Principle 5 of the APA Ethical Principles states that psychologists have a primary obligation to respect the confidentiality of information obtained from persons in the course of their work as psychologists. The principle of confidentiality applies to information gained in clinical or consulting relationships, in departmental committee work, and in research settings. With regard to research, students should establish a means of maintaining confidentiality in storing and disposing of data (with IRB approval) and in reporting research results.

### **Publication Credit**

Principle 6.23 addresses issues concerning authorship credit on multiple co-authored papers. Discussion regarding authorship credit and order should routinely occur amongst authors when *beginning research projects* and working on articles. Please note that principle c states, "A student is usually listed as principal author on any multiple-authored article that is substantially based on the student's dissertation or thesis." Authorship order, however, may sometimes need to be changed as authors assume more or less responsibility on revisions of manuscripts (see article by Fine and Kurdek in *American Psychologist*, November 1993 for recommendations).

## Appendix A—Sample General Prelim Exam Feedback Form

### MEMO

To: Student's name

Date: current date

From: x (advisor) and x (area head)

Re: Feedback on general portion of prelim exam

This is to provide a written record of the feedback you received on the general social psychology portion of the prelim exam. To remind you, prelims are not completed until a student has successfully passed all three portions of prelims: the general social psychology portion of the exam, the student's specialty area reading list, and teaching the introductory social psychology class.

Overall, the social psychology faculty decided that you had [failed/ marginally passed/ passed] the general portion of the exam. Faculty noted as positive aspects of your performance [fill in]. They identified your relative weaknesses as being [fill in].

For the future, the faculty recommend [fill in].

If you have any questions about this feedback or want additional feedback, please feel free to discuss this with your advisor and/or the social area head.

Cc: Student's file

Appendix B: Sample Letter Conveying Feedback about Completion of Research Project with Second Faculty Member

To: Social Area Faculty

Date:

From: [FACULTY MEMBER SERVING AS ADVISOR FOR RESEARCH PROJECT]

Re: Completion of research project and written product

This is to let you know that [STUDENT'S NAME] has successfully completed a research project with me on [TOPIC OF RESEARCH PROJECT]. This project has resulted in one/several written product(s) with [STUDENT'S NAME] as an author. The reference(s) for this/these written product(s) are as follows:

[LIST REFERENCES]

Cc: Student's file