

**PSYCHOLOGY MASTERS PROGRAM
BEHAVIORAL AND BRAIN SCIENCES
GRADUATE STUDENT MANUAL**

**Department of Psychology
University of South Alabama
Mobile, Alabama 36688**

Fall 2025

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Program Mission

The Behavioral and Brain Sciences (BBS) program emphasizes training in the natural and social science specialties in psychology including: biopsychology, cognitive, developmental, comparative, the scholarship of teaching and learning, psycholinguistics, language, personality, social psychology and affiliated areas in the behavioral and brain sciences. The program employs the individualized mentorship model to provide research experience for students seeking preparation for applying to Ph.D. programs, or pursuing college teaching, and other professional career paths. ¹

Introduction

This manual has been compiled to answer questions concerning the BBS program for new graduate students. The basic format of the program and requirements that need to be met to complete a Master of Science degree in psychology are detailed. It is hoped that this manual will help to eliminate confusion and that, in addition to the current *Graduate Bulletin*; it will be a valuable tool for you in planning your graduate course of studies.

This manual is subject to change as departmental and graduate school policies change and should not be considered a binding contract, but rather a helpful guide. Any changes or additions to this manual or to the policies discussed in it will be made with the best interests of the students and the program in mind. Changes will be communicated to you as soon as possible.

Ethical Principles

The Psychology Department supports the adherence to ethical principles in the conduct of any professional activity, including research with human and animal participants and the provision of psychological services. As a student working toward a Master of Science degree in psychology, you will be asked to abide by these principles as well. Three booklets available from the American Psychological Association include statements concerning ethics. These are *Ethical Standards of Psychologists*, *Ethical Principles in the Conduct of Research with Human Participants*, and *Standards for Providers of Psychological Services*. During orientation students will be asked to sign the Ethics Agreement which can be found in Appendix A.

Faculty Mentor/Advising

Students enrolled in the BBS program will be assigned to a faculty mentor upon acceptance to the program. Your faculty mentor will guide you in choosing appropriate courses to meet your objectives, research activities, and in selection of a thesis topic or selection of non-thesis track electives. They will also help with advising and career issues and concerns. A plan for a course of study should be drafted and submitted in writing to the program graduate coordinator for approval prior to the end of the student's first semester in the master's program. The Program of Study Form can be found in Appendix D. Courses will be selected in consultation with the faculty mentor and will usually include general courses in experimental

¹ . Though some alumni have been admitted into clinical/counseling Ph.D. programs, the BBS core faculty are not licensed clinicians, and the BBS program is not intended to prepare students to become clinicians. Students interested in clinical careers are advised to apply to the CCP program.

psychology, special interest areas, and one or more directed studies courses (PSY 594) in addition to the core curriculum. As you meet the other faculty, you should feel free to discuss with them issues related to your progress in the program. It is important to maintain close contact with your mentor, consulting them frequently concerning your progress.

Psychology Graduate Committee

Each year a committee of BBS faculty members is selected to oversee and administer the Master of Science Program in Psychology. The BBS Graduate Coordinator chairs this committee. Any problems, special requests, or other concerns that you have should be submitted to the Graduate Coordinator for consideration by the Graduate Committee. Please submit your concerns or requests in writing.

Academic Policies and Procedures

Thesis Track

Degree requirements for the thesis track concentration can be found in the graduate bulletin at the following link <https://bulletin.southalabama.edu/programs-az/arts-sciences/psychology/psychology-ms/>. This bulletin page includes information on requirements for admission, course hour requirements, curriculum requirements (core and BBS thesis track courses) grade requirements, and comprehensive exams.

Non-Thesis Track

Degree requirements for the non-thesis track concentration can be found in the graduate bulletin at the following link <https://bulletin.southalabama.edu/programs-az/arts-sciences/psychology/psychology-ms-nonthesis-concentration/>. This bulletin page includes information on requirements for admission, course hour requirements, curriculum requirements (core and BBS non-thesis track courses) grade requirements, and comprehensive exams.

Accelerated Bachelors to Masters Admission

The accelerated bachelor's to master's (ABM) program permits qualified students to graduate with a Master of Science in psychology five years from entering as a freshman at South. Accepted undergraduate students will enroll in graduate courses during their Senior undergraduate year. Admission requirements for the ABM program can be found on the thesis track concentration bulletin page <https://bulletin.southalabama.edu/programs-az/arts-sciences/psychology/psychology-ms/>.

Graduate assistantships cannot be offered to ABM students while still enrolled as an undergraduate. However, if students wish to be considered for a graduate assistantship in their fifth year, they should send a written request to the Graduate Coordinator by February 15 of their senior year.

Dual Masters Degrees

A student may enroll in and pursue two master's degrees simultaneously. The policy on dual masters degrees can be found at <https://bulletin.southalabama.edu/programs-az/graduate/> under Admissions Requirements.

Electives

PSY 532 and PSY 550 are not BBS program courses may be taken for elective credit with the permission of the instructor. No courses requiring access to the Psychology Clinic may be taken by students in the Behavioral and Brain Sciences track, including any course with the word "assessment" in it.

Students may choose to enroll in elective courses taught in other departments. Recent elective courses include Aphasia and Neurogenic Language Disorders (SPL 566), Introduction to Qualitative and Mixed Methods Research (IDE 631), Quantitative Methods III (IDE 630), Advanced Human Performance Improvement (IDE 645), Program Research and Evaluation (IDE 660), and Needs Assessment (ISD 640). Other elective courses are possible based on the interests and concentration of the student.

Graduate courses in other departments or colleges may be used as elective credits toward a degree in psychology with the **prior approval of the Graduate Committee**. Such courses must be related to your plan of study and must be approved **before** you register for them. **Submit any such requests to the Graduate Coordinator for evaluation by the Graduate Committee.** Once the graduate coordinator/graduate committee approves your request you will have to obtain permission from the instructor of record for the course to register for the course as well.

Time Commitment

The BBS program is designed as a full time day program. It will not be possible for students to complete degree requirements by attending at night since graduate courses are rarely offered in the evening. Since most courses are offered only once a year, if you do not take a course when it is scheduled, or if you must retake a course, you may have to wait a year or more before that course is scheduled again. As a full-time graduate student, you should be able to complete the requirements for the Master of Science degree in Psychology at the end of two full years, which may include taking classes or thesis hours during two summer semesters.

Review of Progress by Graduate Committee

Graduate student progress will be reviewed each Fall and/or Spring. These evaluations provide a critical means with which a student can gain a more comprehensive understanding of their achievement within the graduate program on the areas necessary for success in Psychology. Reviews will be compiled by the Graduate Committee. It is expected that students will meet with the Graduate Coordinator if there are any unsatisfactory reviews.

The first time a student is found to have unsatisfactory reviews in any category, he or she will be required to devise a plan and have it approved by the Graduate Committee to improve performance in that area. If a student continues to receive unsatisfactory reviews for two or more evaluation periods, the Graduate Committee will conduct a review of that student and recommend an appropriate action, including but not limited to: censure, additional assignments, or dismissal from the graduate program.

Problems

If there are any curriculum-related problems (i.e., availability of courses, course waivers, or approval of transfer credits) that arise during the course of your studies, you should first consult with your faculty mentor. If you cannot resolve the problem to your satisfaction at that level, you may then go through the following channels: (1) Graduate Coordinator, (2) Graduate Committee, (3) Department Chairperson, (4) Director of Graduate Studies for the College of Arts and Sciences, and (5) Dean of the Graduate School. If possible, problems should be dealt with at the departmental level. In no case should you go outside of the department with your concerns without first trying to resolve the problem within the department.

A graduate student who has an academic appeal (i.e., grade appeal) should follow the academic conduct policy in the bulletin (<https://bulletin.southalabama.edu/>) and The Lowdown, the USA student handbook (<https://www.southalabama.edu/lowdown/>).

Research Involvement

The BBS student is expected to be involved in research from his/her first semester in the program. All students (thesis and non-thesis track) are expected to complete a first-year research project by the end of the second semester (or summer term at the latest). If the student chooses the thesis track, then the culmination of their master's program is the completion and oral defense of a master's thesis. A minimum of 6 semester hours of PSY 599 is required to satisfy the thesis option track requirements. **Please submit the form in Appendix F to the graduate secretary prior to registering for PSY 599.** In order to submit this form to the graduate secretary you must have our thesis committee formed and approved by The Graduate School. Students may complete a maximum of 9 hours credit in PSY 594 and a maximum of 9 hours credit in PSY 599.

Non-thesis track students have no research commitment beyond the first year project but are not discouraged from being involved in research within faculty lab.

Master's Thesis

Thesis track students must complete a master's thesis in order to graduate. Completion of a thesis is expected to enhance students' probability of being accepted into a Ph.D. program.

The most difficult task in completing a thesis is probably the task of selecting a research problem and determining the approach you wish to utilize in examining that problem. To give you an idea of what is expected in a thesis; the Psychology Department has prepared a list of criteria for a master's thesis. These are found in Appendix C.

Most theses require a minimum of two semesters for completion and it is quite typical for a longer period to be needed. Therefore, all students should begin thinking about possible research topics as soon as you enter the program. In addition, regular reading of psychology journals may lead to research ideas.

Selection of Thesis Committee

You must work very closely with your research mentor in all stages of the research, from planning through the final oral defense. Your research mentor will help you to select a thesis committee consisting of at least three faculty members, at least one of whom must be from

another department. This committee must then be submitted to the BBS graduate coordinator or Psychology department chair then the graduate dean for approval. **Your thesis committee must be approved before you register for thesis hours.** The purpose of this committee is to advise you about your research. Forms to be used when requesting a thesis committee are available [on-line](#) through the Graduate School.

Changing a Thesis Chair or Committee Member

Students may request a change in their committee members, including their thesis chair. To do so, the following procedures must occur. First, we strongly encourage you to talk directly with your current thesis chair or committee member prior to initiating any actions. To request a change in thesis committee chair, you must request approval in writing from the BBS Graduate Coordinator. A copy of this request must be sent to the existing thesis chair simultaneously. The Graduate Coordinator will bring this request to the Graduate Committee for discussion and approval. The student will be notified in writing of the outcome of this meeting. If the change is approved the student will file new thesis committee paperwork with The Graduate School. Finally, depending on the length of time that the student worked with the original thesis chair, that faculty member may also be given a say in determining a portion of the student's final grade for the thesis.

To request a change in a thesis committee member other than the thesis chair, the students must request approval in writing from their thesis committee chair. The thesis committee chair will notify the student in writing of their decision. If the change is approved the student will file new thesis committee paperwork with The Graduate School.

Thesis Proposal

The first step in completing a thesis, once a topic has been selected, is to write a research prospectus. You may register for PSY 594 (Directed Studies) or PSY 599 (Thesis Research) under the supervision of your research mentor while working on your research prospectus. You may not register for PSY 599, Thesis Research, until you have had your thesis committee approved by The Graduate School. An outline to be used in preparing the prospectus is contained in a *Guide for Preparing the Prospectus*. Further, a *Guide for Preparing Theses and Dissertations* as well as a *Thesis Template* will aid you in the preparation of both your thesis prospectus and the final copy of your thesis. These manuals are available on the Graduate School [webpage](#).

Proposal Orals

An oral defense of your proposal is required for completion of your thesis. When your prospectus is complete, which is determined by you AND your thesis chair, you should schedule a meeting of your committee to consider and approve it. This meeting is open to all interested Psychology Department faculty members. Notice of the time and place of the meeting must be made to the faculty and a copy of your prospectus must be made available in the Psychology Department office at **least one week** in advance of the meeting. In addition, each member of your committee must be given a **DIGITAL** copy of your prospectus at least two weeks prior to the meeting (unless the committee member specifies a preference for a printed copy). Approval of your research project by the IRB or the Animal Use and Care Committee is also required before you begin data collection.

While the Psychology Department may be able to furnish equipment and space necessary

for thesis research, this must be approved by the department chair prior to final approval of your prospectus. Normally, any expenses incurred, including photocopying expenses and test materials, are the responsibility of the student.

Once your prospectus is approved by your committee and the IRB/IACUC, you can proceed with your research as outlined in your prospectus. All members of your committee must approve any major changes from your prospectus. You should periodically inform your committee of the progress of your research, either individually, via email, or by having additional meetings of the entire committee.

Thesis Grades

The chair of your thesis committee (usually your research mentor) will assign grades for PSY 599. They may assign you a letter grade or the grade of P(in progress). Any grade of P (in progress) must be changed to a letter grade after your thesis and oral defense have been completed. Completion of a thesis is determined by the approval of your thesis advisor, a majority of your committee, the department chair, and the graduate dean. Typically, a student will be enrolled in PSY 599 continuously from the inception of the research to its completion. However, a student **MUST** be enrolled in at least one credit hour of thesis in the semester in which he or she graduates.

Thesis Orals

An oral defense of your thesis is required and should occur during the last semester of residence. You must be registered for at least one hour of thesis in the semester in which your thesis is approved. The defense consists of an oral presentation and examination of your research, including, but not limited to, such things as the justification for the research, the methodology, the analysis, and interpretation of the results, and the significance of the research.

Concerning the thesis, the oral defense is open to all interested faculty members and graduate students. Notice of the time and place of your final defense must be sent to the chair of graduate studies for the College of Arts and Sciences at least two weeks prior to the actual defense. In addition, notice of the time and place of the exam must be made to the Psychology Department, a digital copy of the thesis must be provided to each committee member (unless the committee member specifies a preference for a printed copy), and an additional copy must be available in the Psychology Department office at least one week in advance of the defense.

Requirements for typing and format of the final copy of your thesis, as well as requirements for the type of paper to be used, can be found in *A Manual for the Preparation of Graduate Theses and Dissertations* available on the University Website. When that manual does not specify format, the *APA Publication Manual* should be followed. A hard copy of your approved thesis must be submitted to the graduate dean at least three weeks prior to the anticipated date of graduation (see academic calendar for exact date).

All theses must be submitted by the student to Turnitin.com prior to their final acceptance. The results of this submission must be shared with your research chair for evaluation.

Summary of Thesis Requirements and Time Recommendations

1. Selection of research mentor and topic by the end of the first fall semester.
2. Selection and approval of a thesis committee by the end of the first spring semester.
3. Thesis chair and committee approved by the graduate dean, by the end of the first spring semester. **You cannot register for Thesis hours unless you have submitted to the Graduate Coordinator the approved form indicating your thesis chair, committee members and title of your thesis.**
4. Library research and writing of thesis prospectus, worked on during the first spring semester.
5. Meeting of thesis committee to consider prospectus should be scheduled and announced at least one week in advance of meeting, usually at the end of the first spring semester or during the first summer semester.
6. A copy of the prospectus is given to committee members and is available in the department main office one week in advance of meeting.
7. Prospectus approved by thesis committee and department chair by the beginning of the second fall semester.
8. Data collection, analysis, and writing of thesis, during the second fall semester.
9. Oral defense of thesis scheduled and announced to chair of graduate studies for Arts and Sciences at least two weeks prior to actual defense, during the second spring semester.
10. Oral defense announced to Psychology Department at least one week prior to actual defense.
11. Copy of thesis to committee members and available in office at least one week prior to oral defense.
12. Thesis approved by thesis advisor and a majority of thesis committee at oral defense.
13. Thesis approved by department chair.
14. Courtesy check of approved thesis format by Graduate Dean's office. Specific deadlines for this are announced each term.
15. Hard copy of thesis submitted to the graduate dean by specified deadline (approximately three weeks before the end of the term). Thesis approved by the graduate dean.
16. Satisfactory grade submitted by thesis advisor for a minimum of 6 semester hours or equivalent of PSY 599. Note that you must be registered for at least one credit of PSY 599 in the term in which your thesis receives final approval by the graduate dean.

Summary of Program Timeline

Following is a brief timeline you need to follow to receive a Master of Science degree in psychology. If you have any questions, see the appropriate section of this manual and the Graduate Bulletin, and consult with your mentor for clarification.

1. Acceptance to graduate program.
2. Completion of core curriculum and Behavioral and Brain Sciences track courses during first year.
3. Satisfactory completion of Comprehensive Examination in Psychology.
4. Completion of core curriculum (including masters thesis for thesis track students/elective courses for non-thesis track students) and Behavioral and Brain Sciences track courses during second year.
5. Completion of at least 36 approved credits (core curriculum, Behavioral and Brain Sciences track courses, approved electives) with a minimum grade of B in each course.
6. Apply for Graduation (specific deadline appears in University calendar).

APPENDIX A

ETHICS AGREEMENT

I agree to conduct myself in an ethical manner as set forth in *Ethical Standards of Psychologists*, *Ethical Principles in the Conduct of Research with Human Participants* and *Standards for Providers of Psychological Services*. Specifically, I agree that I will not engage in:

1. Misrepresenting (or allowing the misrepresentation of) training, degree, program, or extent of supervision.
2. Engaging in behavior that violates ethical standards, as set forth in the most recent Ethical Principles of Psychologists and the Standards for Providers of Psychological Services.
3. Going beyond levels of training or experience without adequate supervision.
4. Additional paid work outside of an assistantship without the consent of the graduate coordinator or risk losing the assistantship.

I understand and acknowledge that I may be disciplined and possibly dismissed from the Graduate Program in Psychology if I engage in unethical behaviors. It is my understanding that my professional behavior will be reviewed and evaluated in such regard and that due process will be observed.

I concur by my signature to adhere to these standards

Signature

Date

Witness

Return this page to Graduate Coordinator
Department of Psychology
University of South Alabama
Mobile, AL 36688

APPENDIX B

ADMISSIONS AGREEMENT

You have been offered admission to the Behavioral and Brain Sciences Track in the Master's Program of the Department of Psychology at the University of South Alabama. You must meet the degree requirements of this track as outlined below.

Degree Requirements for All Students

1. Completion of at least 36 Semester hours of approved graduate courses with a minimum grade of B including completion of core courses.
2. Successful completion of a comprehensive examination in Psychology.

Name of Applicant

Behavioral and Brain Sciences

_____ My signature below indicates that I have read and understand this agreement. I do plan to enroll in the Behavioral and Brain Sciences Track of the Psychology Master's Program at the University of South Alabama in the Fall Semester 2022 under the conditions outlined above.

_____ I do not plan to enroll in the Psychology Master's Program at the University of South Alabama.

Signature

Date

APPENDIX C

CRITERIA FOR MASTER'S THESES

The Department of Psychology supports the general principle, established by SACS standards and the Council of Graduate Schools, and required by A.C.H.E., that a thesis or dissertation should use scholarly methods to achieve original results. In applying these standards to the discipline of psychology, the Department of Psychology at the University of South Alabama has established the following specific criteria.

1. **Quality:** Theses submitted as a requirement toward the Master of Science degree in psychology must meet the following standards of quality:

- A. **Originality:** Theses should be original in at least one of the following:

1. Topic selection.
 2. Approach/Methodology.
 3. Analysis and Interpretation.
 4. Subject Population.

Note: Normally, literal replications will not be accepted, however replication of research may be acceptable if clear justification can be offered.

- B. **Methodological Soundness:** Theses should be methodologically sound, using research design and statistical analyses appropriate to the problem.

- C. **Logical Soundness:** Theses should be logically sound. This is especially important in theoretical discussions, problem statements, and discussions of results, but should be apparent throughout the thesis.

- D. **Literature Survey:** Theses should include an adequate survey of the relevant literature and a critical examination of that literature.

- E. **Discussion of Results:** Theses should include an adequate discussion of the results of the research to include, where appropriate, possible applications of the results, theoretical inferences that can be drawn from the results, limitations of the study, and further appropriate research.

2. **Range/Scope of Acceptable Topics.** Any topic will be considered appropriate if it relates to the field of general psychology.

3. **Nature of the Research.** Any of the following research approaches will be considered appropriate:

- A. Empirical Analysis.
 - B. Theoretical Analysis.
 - C. Methodological/Procedural Studies - Development of new method or technique or of new application for an old method.

- D. Historical/Archival Research.
- E. Applied Research.

4. **Product:** Normally the product of thesis research will be a manuscript from which could be developed a paper suitable for publication in a refereed journal. The manuscript should be prepared according to guidelines found in the most recent editions of the following two publications:
 - A. Guide for Preparing Theses and Dissertations, the Graduate School, University of South Alabama.
 - B. Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association.
5. **Ethics:** All thesis research should be conducted according to ethical principles as established by the American Psychological Association.
6. **Procedures:** Students must follow established Psychology Department procedures concerning the approval of thesis proposals, conduct of research, and the final oral defense of the thesis.

APPENDIX D

PROGRAM OF STUDY (to be submitted by the end of your first semester)

Student Name: _____ Date: _____

Faculty Mentor: _____

Core Courses

PSY 500	Proseminar in Psychology	4 hours
PSY 501	Research Design and Statistics I	3 hours
PSY 502	Research Design and Statistics II	3 hours

Behavioral and Brain Sciences Track Courses

PSY 586	Cognitive Neuroscience	3 hours
PSY 575	Comparative Psychology	3 hours
PSY 524	Lifespan Development	3 hours
PSY 590	Special Topic	3 hours
PSY 599	Thesis	6-9 hours

Proposed Electives

Course	Title	Hours

Approved:

Graduate Coordinator

Date

APPENDIX E

RUBRIC FOR FIRST-YEAR PROJECT (assessed by comprehensive exam committee)

Strength of the literature review (**Score _____**)

- Relevant literature is covered.
- Literature covered motivates the hypotheses tested.

Organization of the paper (**Score _____**)

- Paper as a whole is organized with each section occurring as determined by APA style.
- Paragraphs are organized in a coherent fashion where one paragraph naturally flows into the next.
- Sentences within a paragraph are organized (intro sentence -> supporting sentences -> conclusion/transition sentence).

Quality of the writing mechanics (**Score _____**)

- APA style is followed.
- Proper syntax is used.
- The paper is free of typos and misspellings.
- Proper word choice is used.

Strength of the hypotheses (**Score _____**)

- The hypotheses follow from the literature review.
- The hypotheses are theoretically motivated.

Design and conduct of study (**Score _____**)

- The appropriate design is used to address the hypotheses.
- Statistical tests are implemented appropriately.
- Data/results are adequately reported.

Conclusions drawn from the results (**Score _____**)

- The conclusions drawn follow from the results are valid given the results.
- The conclusions consider alternative theoretical accounts of the data and acknowledge potential limitations.

Appendix F

Thesis or Dissertation Hours Request

(To be completed the first time you plan to register for PSY 599. Must have Graduate School approval of your thesis committee prior to submitting this form. Bring this completed form to Wanda Milliner.)

SEMESTER _____

STUDENT NAME _____

JAG # _____

COURSE AND SECTION # _____

CRN _____

CREDIT HOURS _____

Complete and submit the Thesis/Dissertation Committee form which is due *before starting or registering* for your Thesis/Dissertation hours. (See link below)

CCP ☐

BBS ☐

I am requesting to take credit hours for: ☐ Thesis ☐ Dissertation ☐

<https://www.southalabama.edu/departments/eforms/graduateschool/thesisdissertationcompcommitteeappt.pdf>

DATE _____

MENTOR _____