Policies and Procedures of the Experimental Psychology Program
Approved 04-20-12

The Department of Psychology provides instruction at the undergraduate level, the graduate level, and occasionally it offers continuing education courses. Faculty members also engage in scholarly activities and in research. To facilitate the various functions the department is organized into program committees. The committees are: (a) Undergraduate Committee, and Graduate Committees in (b) Clinical-Community Psychology, (c) Experimental Psychology, and (d) School Psychology. This Policies and Procedures manual applies to the Experimental Psychology Program.

The departmental faculty can vote to establish other program committees or to alter or abolish existing program committees. The programs will keep official minutes of their actions. These will be made available to all faculty members in the department. Each Graduate Program Committee shall have at least one graduate student representative. The program may elect to have more than the minimum number of representatives. Each Program Committee shall elect a director to act as spokesperson.

Membership in Experimental Program Committee

In order to become a Faculty member of the Experimental Program, psychology faculty must request membership in the program and have a majority vote for admission as a full member of the program. It is the expectation of the Experimental Program that faculty in the program will attend experimental program meetings routinely, participate in program committees and student committees, and participate in program decisions. Faculty who do not wish to participate fully in the program may request to withdraw as a program faculty member or request non-voting status either after or upon request for membership in the Experimental Program. Adjunct members of the Experimental Program do not vote.

Each faculty member may seek membership in one or more Program Committees. For purposes of faculty-wide elections conducted through Program Committees, each faculty member may vote only in one Program Committee.

If a faculty member changes interest, the faculty member may switch committee membership provided that the change is acceptable to the committee with which the faculty member seeks new affiliation.

Program Director

Each Program Committee shall elect a director to act as spokesperson. The term for the Experimental Program Director is two years and is renewable.

The Experimental Program Director is responsible for setting regular meeting times, setting agendas for meetings, and chairing the program meeting. Program meetings will be run according to Robert's Rules except where program or departmental procedures differ; internal procedures take precedence over Robert's Rules. He or she is responsible for appointing members to the Experimental Curriculum and Admissions committee (see below), Advising Committees for graduate students in the program and any ad hoc committees. The Program Director also fulfills the demands placed on all program directors by the Graduate School including writing nominating letters for awards for graduate students and signing forms required by the Graduate School. The Program Director also performs duties as directed by the Chair of
the Department of Psychology. The Program Director may also set a called meeting to address specific issues that are under some time constraint; the meeting may occur no sooner than three business days of it being called. Program members who cannot be present at the meeting may give their opinion on the issue and this will be reported by the Program Director to the members at the called meeting. Quorum at both called and regular program meetings is defined by all of those present at the meeting.

The Program Director is responsible for ensuring both that Experimental Program and Graduate School regulations are met. He or she also ensures that meeting minutes are approved and posted and that the Graduate Student Handbook is updated (when appropriate) and approved every spring.

While some student awards receive nominations directly from the major professor, many of the student awards from the University of South Carolina Graduate School or College of Arts and Sciences limit nominations by Graduate Program. In the case where there is only one nomination from the Experimental Graduate Program, the Graduate Director shall forward that nomination to the appropriate unit. When there is more than one nomination for a particular award, the Graduate Director shall form an ad hoc Awards Committee of two individuals in the Experimental Graduate Program who do not have a conflict of interest. A conflict of interest would consist of either a nominated graduate student being directly supervised by that individual or by that individual’s partner. The Program Director will nominate the graduate student(s) selected by (and in any rank order determined) by the ad hoc Awards Committee.

**Admissions Committee and the Admissions Process**

The admissions process has multiple steps. The admissions committee is responsible for the recruitment of new students. The committee screens applications, recommends students who meet the standards for admission, and recommends financial aid for new and continuing students. Admission of individual students is voted on by the whole program and then the program director makes a recommendation of admission along with the proposed funding plan to the Chair of the Department of Psychology. The Chair of the Department of Psychology has final approval of admissions.

The most important principle for admission to the Experimental Program is that a student to be admitted must have adequate credentials and a good potential fit with at least one mentor who is an active researcher. After this principle is met, admission of a student who has been given full support from a fellowship or grant is given top priority. Admission of a student with department support is dependent upon the qualities of the designated mentor as described below. Department support is defined as either a department-funded graduate assistantship or a teaching position through the evening school.

For admission of students requiring department support, admissions of students to work with assistant and untenured professors who do not have a department-supported graduate student working with them currently takes precedence over admission of other department-supported students.

For admission of students requiring department support, admission of students to work with tenured faculty who do not have graduate students currently working with them takes precedence over admission of department-funded students to work with faculty members who currently have graduate students working with them. This...
Finally, among tenured and untenured professors with graduate students currently working with them, the priority of selecting students to be admitted on department support will depend upon the mentor's:
1) Current number of department-supported students
2) Current or prior record of grant funding
3) Current or prior record of grant-supported students
4) Record of success in mentoring students
5) Current number of graduate students (regardless of funding) and their seniority

Curriculum Committee

The curriculum committee is responsible for evaluating proposed changes in the graduate curriculum, working with the Program Director to insure the regular scheduling of core graduate courses, and considering student petitions for changes in meeting core program requirements that may arise because of special circumstances. The committee also updates the course information in the Handbook. Each Graduate Program Committee is responsible for presenting to the faculty curricular changes. Final approval will be made by the full faculty.

Policies for Graduate Student Advising

The Advising Committee consists of appointed faculty members who are tasked with the responsibility of evaluating students’ ongoing progress as they advance through the program. Until the Dissertation Committee is formed, the student’s Advising Committee will evaluate progress. Once the Dissertation Committee is formed it will serve as the student’s advising committee and this committee still must evaluate the student as to progress. These committees meet once a year at a minimum and then present a recommendation regarding the student’s standing within the department.

Each student’s standing is evaluated once a year by the Experimental Program. The faculty as a whole will review the written evaluation of progress submitted by the current Advising Committee and consider other faculty members assessment of the student’s performance in all relevant areas. These areas include classroom performance, assistantship activity, and research involvement. Emphasis is placed on research involvement. It is possible to have excellent grades and satisfactory performance as a teaching assistant, but fail to show satisfactory progress in the program due to lack of involvement and focus in research.

Students can be rated excellent, good, marginal or unsatisfactory.

Excellent refers to those students who have met their program goals with distinction. Students are rated excellent when they have distinguished themselves based on scholarship or professionalism in at least one domain while maintaining good performance in other domains.

Good performance refers to students who have met all of their program goals.

Marginal performance refers to students who are at risk for an unsatisfactory rating and need to improve their performance in one or more domains. Two consecutive marginal ratings are equivalent to an unsatisfactory rating and require the same procedures as follow an unsatisfactory rating.

Unsatisfactory performance refers to students who have failed to meet a key program goal within the standard timeline or whose performance in one or more domains does not meet the
standards for scholarship and professionalism. A student who fails to convene an annual Advising Committee Meeting receives an unsatisfactory rating automatically. After an unsatisfactory rating, the student must have another advising committee meeting within six months at which she or she will be rated. The performance in all relevant domains of the student must improve during that period of time such that the rating is either good or excellent.

**Two consecutive unsatisfactory ratings will result in automatic termination from the program.** Students with multiple but not consecutive unsatisfactory ratings will be considered for termination at the annual program meeting for the evaluation of students.

All unsatisfactory or marginal ratings of students will be vetted by the Experimental Program committee.

The following are descriptions of the standards that are expected from graduate students to receive a good rating at the annual advising meeting.

First year graduate students are expected to have submitted an informal qualifying project proposal and met with their Advisory Committee to discuss their progress and proposal by the end of their first semester. By the end of their second semester, a formal proposal is submitted for consideration by their committee and discussion at the spring advisory committee meeting. Satisfactory (B or above) performance in all courses is expected and the majority of modules and PSYC 709/710 should be completed by the end of their first year. Effective performance as a teaching or research assistant and active involvement in laboratory research is expected.

Second year graduate students are expected to present their research data in a setting accessible to faculty members and graduate students - this is typically at the Hard Data colloquium series by the end of their fall semester. Their formal qualifying project must be submitted to their Advisory committee one month prior to the advisory committee meeting at the end of the spring semester. The qualifying project in conjunction with all other course work should be considered satisfactory to qualify for Ph.D. candidacy by the end of the second year. Satisfactory (B or above) performance in all courses is expected and the majority of course work should be completed by the end of the second year. All modules and required statistics courses should be completed. Effective performance as a teaching or research assistant is expected. Student should be presenting their research at scientific meetings and have either submitted or be preparing to submit manuscripts for publication.

Third year students are expected to fully complete all of their course work and have at least begun their Written Comprehensive Exam by the Spring semester of their third year. At least one manuscript should be submitted for publication by the third year. All course work except for dissertation hours and electives should be completed in this year.

Fourth year students are expected to be finished with all course work except for dissertation hours and have at least one published manuscript based primarily on research on which the student has taken lead.

Fifth year students are expected to be either finished or about to finish their dissertation (within six months of the spring semester of the fifth year). If a fifth year student is not about to finish their dissertation, a specific written plan needs to be formulated by the student in conjunction with their advising or dissertation committee that outlines how the Ph.D. degree will be finished by the end of the sixth year. A failure to finish the Ph.D. degree by the end of the sixth year
results in an unsatisfactory rating unless there are extenuating circumstances such as approved leave for illness or family matters.

Some students in the Experimental Program are also jointly enrolled in the university's Behavioral-Biomedical Interface Program (BBIP), which is supported in part by an NIH/NIGMS T32 institutional research training grant. Note that students completing the BBIP training program are expected to meet these expectations with two exceptions with respect to timing. For BBIP students, the qualifying project is expected to begin in the second year and be completed by the third year and the majority of modules and PSYC 709/710 are expected to be completed by the end of their second year.

**Policies and Procedures for Course Substitutions**

All degree requirements for graduate students are approved by the Dean of the Graduate School, the student's Major Professor, and the Graduate Program Director. Petitions for exceptions to departmental degree requirements must be approved by the student's Major Professor, the Graduate Program, and the Chair of the Department. In the Experimental Program, students may take one course from PHPH 752A through G instead of one of the courses from PSYC 702 A,B,C,D or PSYC 703 A,B,C,D with the approval of just their advising committee. However, any other course substitutions must be approved by the Advising Committee and the Program Director prior to enrollment in the course. Substitutions must have a strong written rationale from Major Professor (with approval from the Advising Committee). The Program Director may decide to bring the particular course substitutions to the Experimental Program Committee for discussion and approval.

**Policy concerning Funds provided for graduating doctoral Students**

Funds provided from the Provost’s office for graduating doctoral students are provided to the Department of Psychology under jurisdiction of the Chair. The current Chair has allowed the Program Director to designate how these funds be spent. The Experimental Program has agreed to use 50% of the funds for program needs related to graduate students. The remaining 50% of the funds will be used by the dissertation director for graduate student needs.