

Doctoral Preliminary Project

Purpose and General Information

The Pre-Doctoral Preliminary Project is used to: a) determine the student's preparation and readiness for independent, Dissertation research; and, b) assess whether the student has developed analytical, problem-solving, and critical thinking abilities at a level befitting doctoral candidacy. Successful completion of the Preliminary Project may be considered as the initiation of Doctoral Candidacy.

In order to be eligible to begin the Preliminary Project, the student must have the written approval of his/her Preliminary Project Committee Chair. Students become eligible for enrollment in Preliminary Project (PSYC 7000) after successfully completing all requirements for the Master's degree, including successful defense of the Thesis (and, for clinical students, passing the Clinical Capstone Project). Eligibility for students will be determined by DCT/DET primary academic advisor.

General Policies about Preliminary Project

- Preliminary Project Committee chairpersons will be full-time psychology faculty with appropriate graduate faculty status.
- The committee will be composed of at least four faculty members, all of whom must be full-time, tenured or tenure-track faculty members, with an earned doctorate or a terminal degree in their fields, and holding at least temporary ETSU Graduate Faculty status. Of these four, at least two must be designated experimental/clinical psychology faculty (depending on concentration), and at least one must be designated the alternate concentration within the Department of Psychology. A fifth consulting (non-voting) member may be added if necessary (i.e., an expert from another institution; a community placement mentor), but he or she must still have an earned doctorate or terminal degree in the field and at least hold temporary graduate faculty status at ETSU.
- Any changes in committee membership should be discussed with all involved parties, in addition to area faculty and Director. The student is responsible for seeing that formal changes to the graduate school committee form are made.
- A graduate school committee form should be completed and submitted to the departmental executive aide who will deliver it to the graduate school.

- If a student has difficulty finding faculty to serve or must replace a committee member, the preliminary project chair or primary academic advisor will provide assistance.
- Preliminary project defenses are expected to be:
 - a. Announced (time and place) to Psychology faculty and graduate students two weeks ahead of time. Students should notify the DCT/DET and have a notice posted on “Psychtalk” listserv.
 - b. Judged according to a reasonable standard of rigor;
- After a successful defense, the student should get all forms signed and submitted to the departmental executive aide.

Preliminary Project Guidelines and Requirements

The Preliminary Project will serve as an evaluation of qualification for doctoral candidacy. The Preliminary Project takes the form of a scholarly written product, which will make a substantive and original contribution to our scientific understanding of some area of psychology, broadly construed. For experimental students, this contribution will include development and preparation of a review paper, meta-analysis, grant proposal or comprehensive exam. For clinical students, this contribution will include development and submission of a grant proposal, preparation and submission of a peer-reviewed empirical, conceptual, or review article for publication, or the development and completion of a pilot research project. The completed project should provide a critical, evaluative, and integrative review and interpretation of content and methodological issues pertaining to the selected area of psychology, and it should advance the student’s area of research interest, thereby demonstrating breadth of knowledge. As a very general guide, the project should address the following issues as relevant: 1) theoretical approaches to the content domain (historical and contemporary); 2) identification of major theoretical issues in the content domain; 3) strengths and limitations of various research methods used in the content domain; 4) measurement issues (both research and clinical applications); 5) relevance to translation or clinical applications; 6) ethical issues (research and clinical); and, 7) future directions in theory, research, and translation. These specific expectations might differ by type of project.

A student’s decision about which type of scholarly project to complete for the Preliminary Project will be made in consultation with his or her Preliminary Project Committee

Chair. Despite the format or particular project selected and approved, the student should, at all times, approach the Preliminary Project as a professional and scientific endeavor.

Preliminary Project Proposal

After consultation with the Preliminary Project Committee Chair, a student must submit and orally defend his or her proposed Preliminary Project to the committee, including a proposed reading list. Proposal length may vary, but in all cases should contain sufficient background review and logical argumentation to enable committee members to judge the appropriateness of the project. At the Proposal stage of the Preliminary Project, students will receive summary feedback from their committee regarding the proposed direction, content, and expectations of their project.

For Experimental Concentration students the project proposal will involve (1) the student's goals for the project, including the areas of expertise that they wish to solidify and deepen, (2) selection and justification of the content area(s), to include methodological, psychometric, and statistical domains as appropriate in addition to the theoretical or substantive content areas, and (3) a proposed reading list of approximately 100 sources. Students should expect this reading list to be altered or expanded during the proposal meeting. The reading list should be carefully considered, as Exam questions and responses will be constrained by it. Prior to the proposal meeting, students should meet with each member of the Advisory Committee to determine whether the faculty require specific readings or domains.

Within 72 hours of the successful conclusion of the proposal meeting, the student is required to transcribe, summarize and address the agreed-upon elements of the project, forming an *action plan* for completion of the Preliminary Project on the departmental preliminary project proposal form. For those undertaking the Comprehensive Exam, this document must include the agreed-upon content areas and reading list. Committee members must approve the summary and action plan. Such approval by the committee also indicates that the proposed Preliminary Project is of sufficient scope to satisfy the requirements of the Preliminary Project. Students may seek and receive oral and written guidance and feedback on their project until the point of formal approval of the Preliminary Project Proposal by the committee. Upon committee approval, students must work on their Preliminary Projects independently and with non-written consultation from their chairs or committee members. Students are encouraged to seek written

feedback from other faculty and colleagues outside of the committee or department. Students will have a period of three months (90 days) from time of approval to complete and submit the Preliminary Project to their committee. Oral defense of the Preliminary Project should occur as soon after this date as feasible, but does not have to be completed within the three-month timeframe.

Given that the Preliminary Project committee members have heretofore played a consultative role in the project and during this three-month period are playing a limited role (restricted to verbal or general but not detailed written feedback), broad responsibility for the quality of the Preliminary Project solely rests upon the student. As such, the student is again reminded to, at all times approach this Project as a scientific endeavor, indeed the capstone for achieving doctoral candidacy.

The Comprehensive Exam will take place over two full, consecutive days with two sections each day. The student will receive six questions each day and will choose four to respond to, subject to restrictions specified below. Students must write the exam without using any external resources except for the unannotated reading list. Each faculty member of the student's Graduate Advisory committee will contribute three questions. The questions will be classified as primarily involving knowledge/understanding, synthesis/integration, application/translation, or critique/evaluation. The student may choose two questions from each faculty member to answer, but they must make sure that each of the four focal areas receives at least one response. Comprehensive Examination question responses must be supported with references to the reading list.

Upon Preliminary Project committee chair recommendation, students will orally defend the project before the full committee. Failure to complete the written Preliminary Project within the designated three-month period will be considered indicative of inadequate progress in the program and possible dismissal from the program. The primary criterion for evaluating the Preliminary Project will be the extent to which it provides a cogent, compelling, original, and substantive contribution to the scientific and/or theoretical understanding of the domain of interest. Specific expectations for the final product are outlined in the rubric. In most cases, the product should not exceed 40 pages of text, excluding title page, abstract, references, and appendices, unless a more extensive document is approved by the committee. The student will

work directly with the Preliminary Project chair to make final edits prior to submission of the manuscript to an academic journal.

The Preliminary Project committee chair may act in a consultative role to the student, helping the student to select a topic areas and breadth/depth that meet the guidelines while being sufficiently original and independent enough from the intended dissertation research. Ideally, the Preliminary Project will inform the dissertation, perhaps more broadly construed or more narrowly focused, but the student should not expect the Preliminary Project to simply be a literature review for the background section of the dissertation. The expectation is that the student will seek to publish some form of the final, approved Preliminary Project in a peer-reviewed journal (or other approved outlet).

Oral Defense of Preliminary Projects

The student, upon completion of the Preliminary Project, will be required to orally defend the project before the full committee. The purpose of the oral defense of the Preliminary Project is: 1) to extend the evaluation of the student's knowledge and understanding of subject matter covered in the written document or approved in proposal; 2) to evaluate the student's ability to respond, in a scholarly and professional manner, to a variety of verbal inquiries; 3) to evaluate the student's ability to address limitations of prior research with future research ideas; and 4) especially for experimental students, to evaluate the student's application of theory and research through an emphasis on translational work.

The rubric provides a list of criteria on which the students will be evaluated in both the written and oral portions of the defense. The criteria on which written products will be evaluated include: organization; technical writing quality; comprehensiveness of content; methodology; and critique and innovation. Also expected is that students will have sought, received, and incorporated feedback from other faculty or colleagues during the preliminary project process. The criteria on which the oral defense will be evaluated include: professionalism; engagement with the audience; tone; use of appropriate visual aids; organization of material and delivery; responses to questions.

Passing/Failing Preliminary Project

Students will have the opportunity to earn one of the following ratings for the written preliminary project: pass with distinction; pass with revisions; conditional pass; or fail. For the oral portion of the defense, students can receive a pass or fail. However, the decision on oral defense is based, in part, on the decision on the written component. For students earning a conditional pass on the written component, a second oral defense will be required after the substantial revisions are complete. For students failing the written component, an oral defense will occur only after a new project is completed.

For a component of the preliminary Project to be considered fully passed, at least three committee members must have assigned a passing vote on both the written and oral components. A full pass may still require minor revisions to the written component, as outlined in the rubric. In the event of a student obtaining a pass with revisions, committee members will communicate in writing, the nature of the revisions required to the student, the Preliminary Project chair, and the DCT/DET. The remedial revisions then must be completed, within 30 days, to the satisfaction of the majority of the committee for the student to be considered passed. The student is required to provide a revision letter to all committee members, which outlines how each of the suggested changes was addressed. All committee members must approve this revision letter and, if requested by the committee, the revised preliminary project. *Students earning a pass (either with distinction or with revisions) on both written and oral components will receive a grade of A for PSYC 7000.* In some instances, a student may pass the written component but fail the oral component. The oral will be considered failed if at least two committee members have assigned a fail. In these cases, a grade of F will be given in PSYC 7000. The student will be required to retake PSYC 7000 and complete a second oral defense.

If the written component requires substantial revision, a student will be given a conditional pass. The major changes needed might include significant methodological, literature, or analytic modifications, for example. *Students earning a conditional pass will receive a grade of C for PSYC 7000.* In the event of a student obtaining a Conditional Pass, committee members will communicate, in writing, the nature of the remedial measures required to the student, the Preliminary Project chair, and the DCT/DET. It is possible that the remedial measures may involve meeting with at least one member of the committee to handle the unresolved issues. In the revision process, the student is required to provide a revision letter to all committee members, which outlines how each of the committee suggested changes were addressed within

60 days of defense. All committee members must review and approve the revised preliminary project. Student must re-defend the (revised) project. Both components must pass. *Upon successful revision of the PSYC 7000 grade will be changed to B. With unsuccessful revision this grade will be changed to F. Failing the revision of the preliminary project will put the student in jeopardy of losing funding. A student receiving a failing grade will be required to retake the PSYC 7000 and begin a new preliminary project process (which may involve a new committee).*

If the written component is not acceptable in its current form and the document cannot be salvaged with major revisions, the student will be given a fail. The written component will be considered failed if at least two committee members have assigned a fail. *Students earning a fail will receive a grade of F for PSYC 7000. A student earning a failing grade will be required to retake the PSYC 7000. A new preliminary project must be proposed and completed within 90 days after receiving these results. Only under extraordinary circumstances will an extension be granted, and only with the approval of the full area faculty and Director. A failure of either component of the second Preliminary Project will result in dismissal from the program. Upon successful proposal and defense of a second preliminary project, students will be given a B in PSYC 7000.*

Assigned grades for PSYC 7000 by committee decision and first or second round

Round 1 Decision	Round 1 Grade	Round 2 Decision	Round 2 Grade
Pass both oral and written components (with distinction or with revisions)	A	----	----
Conditional Pass	C (change to B if successful revision)	Pass/Fail*	B or F
Fail	F	Pass/Fail	B or F

*Round 2 only if substantial revisions are not successfully addressed in Round 1.

Note: Students will be provided with the final outcome of the pass/fail voting of their committee members, but individual committee member votes will remain confidential.

Documentation including committee signature and rubric scoring forms, and the Preliminary Project written product will be maintained in the student's permanent record.

Doctoral Candidacy Checklist

Clinical

- Completed master's thesis has been approved by the Graduate School
- Passed clinical capstone project written portion
- Passed clinical capstone project oral portion
- Completed Practicum
- Completed Preliminary Project
- Approval received from Primary Academic Advisor and signed by DCT

Experimental

- Completed master's thesis has been approved by the Graduate School
- Completed Preliminary Project
- Approved Application for Candidacy for the Doctoral Degree

