

Texas A&M University Social & Personality Graduate Program

The primary goal of our program is to assist in developing graduate students into productive, independent researchers who are likely to obtain post-doctoral positions or research-oriented faculty positions following graduation. The graduate program is designed to promote the progress of students as researchers in social and personality psychology, while maintaining sufficient flexibility to permit interdisciplinary and/or specialized training.

In graduate training, students are expected to (1) become actively involved in research; (2) complete program requirements; and (3) develop professionally.

Active Involvement in Research

The core objective of the doctoral program is to train students as scientists. Students are expected to become actively involved in research with their primary mentor as soon as (or before) they begin graduate study. Scientific study is considered to be graduate students' primary focus, and therefore the bulk of time and effort throughout the year, including summers and winter break, should be devoted to conducting and disseminating research. Actively participating in research also means that graduate students are involved in the daily activities of their laboratory, including training and monitoring undergraduate students, designing studies, and any other activities that support the research functions of their lab.

Writing is one of the most difficult skills to learn, and critical to graduate study and obtaining academic jobs. Writing is best learned through an iterative process that involves feedback, and therefore students are also strongly encouraged to work with their advisor to begin writing up findings and ideas as soon as possible after starting the graduate program. Students are also expected to actively pursue opportunities to improve their writing productivity and skills (e.g., through university sponsored workshops, professional development series).

Students are encouraged to develop collaborations with multiple faculty members and other graduate students. This might mean attending lab meetings in the labs of other faculty or requesting meetings with other faculty to discuss research ideas. Students pursuing collaborations are expected to be the driving force in these projects and should actively reach out to faculty and other students to develop research ideas and studies.

Students are encouraged to apply for grants to support their research and training. Grant applications can be submitted to the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, and other places.

Program Requirements and Timelines

Courses

Students are required to take 9 credit hours per semester, and are required to successfully complete the following courses:

Two department-level statistics courses (6 credits)

Six social psychology courses (18 credits; Theories of Social Psych, Advanced Methods in Social Psychology; plus at least four other classes)

Professional Seminar in Social Psychology (i.e., “brown bag”, 2 credits)

Grad student seminar (1 credit in the first semester of Year 1)

Two psychology courses outside of social (6 credits)

- With approval from the area, one of these courses can be taken in a department other than Psychological and Brain Sciences. To pursue this option, students must provide their advisers with a written rationale for why the outside department course should be part of their degree plan. The adviser will share that rationale with the area faculty, who will then vote to approve or deny the request. A 2/3 majority vote is needed to approve an outside department course for this requirement.
- Courses taught by social area faculty that contain a significant interdisciplinary component or content outside traditional social and personality psychology approaches (e.g., health psychology) may also fulfill this requirement. To pursue this option, students must provide their advisers with a written request to count the course as an outside area course. The adviser will share that request with the area faculty, who will then vote to approve or deny the request. A 2/3 majority vote is needed to approve the request.

Students must discuss their class selections with their primary advisor each semester. This will aid students in selecting classes that are best suited for their career goals. The advisor may adjust these requirements (e.g., to ensure that the student registers for the appropriate number of total credits) and may require that the student take additional classes beyond the requirements outlined here. **The following is an example schedule of courses that would fulfill the requirements (due to faculty teaching schedules, students may need to modify this schedule in order to take social or out-of-area classes that coincide with their interests).**

Sample schedule/timeline

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Fall	1) PSYC620 - Theories of Social Psy 2) PSYC607 – Experimental Psych 3) Grad student seminar (1) 4) PSYC670 - Professional Seminar (2)	1) Advanced Methods in Social Psychology* 2) Social psych course (3) Research	1) Out-of-area course (3) Research	Research	Research
Spring	1) Social psych course (3) 2) PSYC671 - Exp Design Behav Scien	1) Social psych course (3) 2) Social psych course (3) Research	1) Out-of-area course (3) Research	Research	Research

	3) PSYC670 - Professional Seminar (2) 4) Research (1)				
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*It is recommended that Advanced Methods in Social Psychology be taken as soon as possible.

Social area courses include: Personality, Emotions/Affective Science, The Self, Cultural Psychology, Stereotypes & Prejudice, Self-Regulation, and Judgment and Decision Making. Additional courses might be offered as PSYC621s or PSYC689s based on faculty expertise and student interest.

In the above example schedule of courses, “Research” is taken as PSYC 685 or 691. Prior to the third year, students may take only 8 credits of PSYC 691. Students can also register for the Professional Seminar in years 2-5 as needed. Students might also register for the department-level PSYC697 Teaching of Psychology.

At 9 hours per semester and 10 semesters, students will have 90 credit hours. Students should also register for some research hours in summer in order to fulfill the 96-hour PhD requirement. (Registration in summer is required for students obtaining summer funding.) For the PhD, 96 hours are needed. Many of these credits will be completed in research.

Students entering the program with a Master’s degree may petition to have the class requirements reduced. However, the decision on class requirement reduction rests jointly with the advisor and the psychology department graduate coordinator.

Other Program Requirements

Failure to meet these requirements by the deadlines is grounds for being put on probationary status, which is the first step of losing good standing in the program. A loss of good standing results in a loss of departmental funding.

** Students are required to regularly attend Professional Seminar (i.e. “brownbag”) every semester. They are also required to give one oral presentation each year in Professional Seminar.

First Year:

- Students are required to meet with all social area faculty during their first semester, to learn about their research interests and projects. These meetings might foster additional collaborations, depending on the interests of the faculty member and the student.
- First-Year Project: Students are required by the Department to conduct a first year project, under the guidance of their primary advisor.
- Before beginning their second year of study (i.e., by the first day of Fall classes during their second year), students are required to write their first-year project in journal article form. Within one month of completing the paper, the student should set a meeting for discussion of faculty feedback on the paper. This meeting should include the student’s advisor and the two other faculty members from the area. This, along with a committee meeting and other formalities required by Office of Graduate Studies, could serve as the basis for a terminal Master’s when needed.

- First-year students with strong academic records are also encouraged to submit NSF fellowship applications during their first semester in the program. Students are required to work closely with their mentors to prepare their first-year projects for publication.

Second Year:

- Students present the findings of their first-year project at a department-wide poster presentation.

Third Year:

- Students are required to successfully defend a major area paper (MAP) by **April 15th** of their third year.
- Students should work with their primary advisor to identify a written scholarly product to fulfill the MAP requirement that fits with their unique training goals. Options include, but are not limited to, an empirical manuscript, a meta-analysis, a theoretical review paper, a grant application, or an expanded foundation for dissertation research (e.g., an introduction and outline to a series of programmatic studies). **In all cases, the document must be primarily written by the student and should represent growth from the first year project.**
- In consultation with the primary advisor, the student will select two additional faculty members to form a three-person Guidance Committee (GC). The GC may include 1 faculty member who is not primarily affiliated with the Social Area if deemed appropriate by the primary advisor. If the student or advisor chooses to do so, **a proposal meeting can be held to discuss the nature of the project at some earlier point in the student's training, but a proposal meeting is not required.**
- A defense meeting must be scheduled with GC members to be held prior to the April 15th deadline. The GC will review the written product prior to this meeting and the student will provide an oral defense of the project at the meeting.
- At the end of the defense, the student will be excused so the GC can evaluate the project and reach a summary decision. There are three outcomes of the defense - Approve, Revise, or Reject. In some cases, the GC will outline steps for remediation when the final product is judged unacceptable. This outcome is expected to be very rare and should prompt the student to strongly evaluate any decision to continue to pursue a PhD degree at Texas A & M University.

Fourth and Fifth Year:

- For the PhD, the student must, in discussion with the primary advisor, form a committee of four faculty members (one member of the four must be from outside the department).
- A proposal meeting should occur by the end of the Spring semester of the fourth year (but could also occur earlier to fit individual training goals). **Per department policy (effective for students admitted Fall 2018 and after), failure to propose by the end of the fourth year results in a loss of a departmental funding in the fifth year.** This meeting will be used to satisfy University and Department requirements that students complete a written and oral preliminary exam. Students should be prepared for general questions, based on their previous course work and academic experiences, and questions more specific to their proposed research project.
- A final defense meeting should occur during the Spring of the fourth or fifth year.
- Students should be mindful of OGAPS deadlines and timelines regarding preliminary exams and dissertation defenses; see <http://ogaps.tamu.edu/New-Current-Students/Getting-a-Degree/Doctoral-Degree-Requirements> and <http://ogaps.tamu.edu/Buttons/Calendars>.

Professional Development

Professional development requires becoming familiar with researchers and research being conducted in the department and in social/personality psychology. This can be accomplished by following the below recommendations.

- Professional memberships. Students are encouraged to join the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, as well as any societies relevant to their particular area of interest (often organizations to which your primary advisor belongs). As part of membership, students are also expected to keep up to date with society business and discussions, typically through listservs moderated by the society. Students are also expected to be familiar with the recent research reported in journals, by reading the top journals each month (e.g., *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*).
- Conferences & other talks. Students should attend one or more professional conventions each year (e.g., Society for Personality and Social Psychology). At conferences, students will learn of current research before it appears in journals. They will also have the opportunity to meet colleagues from other universities. Students are expected to give oral and poster presentations at these conferences. Students are also expected to attend weekly brownbag presentations in the social area, all talks in the department or university by social/personality psychologists from other universities, and student meetings related to social/personality psychology or with visiting social psychologists.
- Preparing for job market expectations. Early in their graduate training, students are strongly encouraged to identify the current expectations in the job market for their area. They should review vitas of current and recent applicants for academic positions to identify the quantity and quality of publications that are considered competitive for the current job market. Students should also work to create their own vita as soon as possible after beginning the program and update it regularly. Students should also seek out and attend department-level and university-level training opportunities related to professional development.

Progress Reports

To provide structure and accountability, all students are required to submit the following to their advisor by April 15 of each year: an updated vita, an updated program requirement progress report (see below), an updated course requirement progress report (see below), and a statement outlining their research accomplishments, academic progress (GPA, degree plan), and their goals for the coming year (students should ask their primary advisor about preferred format). These materials will provide the basis for the student's annual evaluation letter, which will be written by the student's advisor in consultation with the two additional faculty members selected by the student, with additional input provided by the social area faculty.

During the first year, the faculty in the social program will review each student after each semester and provide written feedback indicating the student's progress in the program (i.e., satisfactory vs. unsatisfactory). In all years, the faculty will review each student after the Spring semester. Satisfactory progress will be evaluated based on research productivity, grades, teaching, and fulfilling professional obligations. Students will receive the yearly evaluation letter on or before May 31, and first year students will receive their initial evaluation letter on or before December 31.

If a student is making unsatisfactory progress, the faculty will request specific actions that need to be taken by the student in order to make satisfactory progress and maintain good standing in the program. A student whose review indicates unsatisfactory progress will be on probation for one semester, during which s/he is expected to remedy the problems noted by the faculty. Lack of satisfactory progress after one semester of probation results in a loss of good standing in the program, which results in loss of access to departmental resources (i.e., Teaching Assistantships, Diversity or Merit Fellowships) and/or a recommendation of removal from the program.

Program Requirement Progress Report

Requirement	Year	Date completed	Comments
Meet with all social area faculty	1		
First year brownbag presentation	1		
Complete first year paper and hold discussion meeting with advisor and 2 other faculty from area	1		
			<i>Paper completed by first day of classes of second year; meeting to be held within one month of completing paper</i>
Present at second year poster session	2		
Second year brownbag presentation	2		
Defend MAP	3		
			<i>By April 15th</i>
Third year brownbag presentation	3		
Form dissertation committee	3 or 4		
Fourth year brownbag presentation	4		
Dissertation proposal meeting	4		
			<i>Must be completed by end of spring semester for 5th year funding</i>
Fifth Year brownbag presentation	5		
Defend dissertation	5		

Course Requirement Progress Report

Course	Semester Completed / Course Name for Electives	Final Grade	Comments
PSYC 620: Theories of Social Psychology			
First Year Grad Seminar (1 credit)			
PSYC 607: Experimental Psych (Statistics)			
PSYC 671: Experimental Design for Behavioral Science (Statistics)			
Advanced Research Methods in Social Psychology			
Social Psych Elective 1			
Social Psych Elective 2			
Social Psych Elective 3			
Social Psych Elective 4			
Professional Seminar in Social Psychology (brownbag; 2 credits)			
Outside Area Course 1			
Outside Area Course 2*			

*With approval from the area, one outside area course can be taken from a department other than Psychological and Brain Sciences

Note that these required courses will not be enough to fulfill the 96 hour PhD requirement – these are only the courses required in our curriculum document