DEPARTMENTAL HANDBOOK OF REQUIREMENTS AND REGULATIONS

Department of Psychology
Virginia Commonwealth University
2017-18 Academic Year

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Note: Students may download forms mentioned in the handbook by following the interactive links included in this document. Forms vary as to whether or not they may be downloaded as a read-only PDF or modifiable Microsoft Word document.
Introduction

This Handbook describes the policies governing graduate studies in the Department of Psychology at Virginia Commonwealth University that have been instituted by the Department and its graduate programs. The VCU Graduate School sets basic policies to govern graduate studies in all departments of the University; these are found in the Graduate Bulletin. Departments may adopt additional and/or more stringent policies than those of the VCU Graduate School, and each graduate program within the Department may adopt additional and/or more stringent policies than those of the Department. Students should read the Graduate Bulletin (Note: Bulletin link is to the Bulletin page for the College of Humanities & Sciences; each of our programs has its own page), become familiar with policies established by the VCU Graduate School, read this Handbook to learn of additional and/or more stringent policies enforced by the Department, and read the handbook published by each program within the department to learn of the additional and/or more stringent policies enforced by the respective programs. Any deliberate attempt to circumvent the standards and procedures discussed here will be considered an honor’s violation.
General Academic Requirements and Policies

Departmental Core Curriculum Requirements

The intent of the core curriculum requirement is to ensure that all graduate students in the Department receive a strong foundation in the basic science of psychology. All graduate programs in the department then add specific areas of interest to the core.

Thus, each student is educated first as a psychologist and then helped to develop competence in a more specialized area relevant to the student's scholarly and professional objectives. It is important that graduate students develop and demonstrate both research proficiency and the capacity to evaluate research findings early in their graduate programs.

The Department's core curriculum is designed to provide students with a solid foundation in psychology as a basis for later individual study. Students in all doctoral programs are required to successfully complete the core curriculum as part of the requirements for the M.S. degree. Those students entering the graduate program with a master's degree in psychology are also required to complete the core curriculum and are encouraged to do so as early as possible. Approved transfer courses (see following section on transfer credits) may be applied toward this requirement. The required core courses for ALL doctoral students in the department include:

1. **Statistics sequence**: PSYC 680 & PSYC 681 – Statistics in Psychological Research I & II
2. **Course in learning/cognition**: PSYC 619 - Learning and Cognition
3. **Course in the biological bases of behavior**: PSY 629 Biological Basis of Behavior
4. **Course in ethics**: PSYC 675 - Ethical Principles of Psychology (Some programs permit students to substitute other courses--please see individual program handbooks and the Graduate Bulletin for details)

*About the statistics courses*: Please note that PSYC 680 has a prerequisite of an undergraduate statistics course. In addition, because PSYC 680 is an advanced course in statistics, if you have not taken a statistics course in 3 or more years, you are strongly advised to consult with your advisor and consider taking a psychology statistics course in the summer prior to enrolling in PSYC 680 (i.e., the summer before starting graduate school). An online test is available to assess incoming student's knowledge of the concepts found in a prerequisite course. Students are advised to take this test if they have not taken a statistics course in the last three years or are uncertain about their readiness for a graduate statistics course. Feedback on test performance will be given, which may be used to correct any knowledge deficits on the prerequisite statistics material. The online test will be made available in May.

Grades

Students are required to maintain a grade point average of 3.00 in psychology courses and a 3.00 overall grade point average. A grade of C or lower in more than six credits of non-core psychology courses constitutes grounds for automatic dismissal of a student from the program.

Students who receive a grade of C or lower in one of the department core courses must either:

a) satisfactorily complete a re-examination of the material covered in the course within one semester following the receipt of the grade (this re-examination is to be arranged and evaluated by the course instructor); or
b) repeat the course for credit the next time it is offered and receive a grade of B or better.
Students who receive a grade of C or lower in any department core course must send a letter to the Director of Graduate Studies indicating which option they intend to pursue. This decision should be made in consultation with the student's advisor and the course instructor. The letter should be co-signed by the course instructor and must be received by the Director of Graduate Studies before the first day of classes for the semester following receipt of the grade. Regardless of which of these approaches is chosen, the student will only be given one opportunity to demonstrate that they have mastered the course material. Students who either fail the re-examination or repeat the course and receive a grade of C or lower will be dismissed from the program.

Grades of “I” (Incomplete), if not completed in the appropriate time with an accompanying grade change (“I” in Fall, complete by end of following spring semester, “I” in Spring, complete by end of following Fall semester), will be administratively recorded as an “F.” The student will be notified in writing of this occurrence. An F grade in any graduate course may result in student dismissal from the program. For more information on VCU’s grade policy, see the current Graduate Bulletin for your program.

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**Transfer Credits / Waiver of Requirements**

**Transfer Credits**

Students who have earned graduate credits in graduate courses outside of VCU but not as part of a degree program may wish to transfer credits from another institution to VCU. Credits may NOT be transferred if applied toward a degree (e.g., MA or MS) that was earned previously at any institution, including VCU. Transfer credits will be considered after the student has completed nine semester hours in this Department, though a student may receive pre-approval in advance to assist in course planning. The student’s advisor must:

1. review and evaluate courses with the student and
2. initiate the formal evaluation process.

Students may be asked to provide syllabi, course outlines, catalog descriptions, and other course materials to facilitate the evaluation of coursework. This information will be submitted to an instructor who teaches a comparable course at VCU or, in case such a person is not available, the student’s program director.

A maximum of 30 percent of coursework other than research applied toward all doctoral programs at VCU may be transferred from another VCU program or outside institution. Acceptance of transfer credit is made at the school level (Various programs or divisions may have more stringent requirements).

All transfer work must be at the "A" or "B" grade level from an accredited institution or university. Students should complete the [Transfer Credit Request Approval Form](#), which must be accompanied by an official transcript listing the course, and the packet may be submitted by the student's Program Director to the Director of Graduate Studies. A request will then be made to the VCU Graduate School to have the transfer courses added to the student's VCU transcript.

The American Psychological Association requires that the transcript of the institution awarding the Ph.D. degree reflect all relevant coursework. To that end, in addition to coursework approved for official transfer, coursework approved as a waiver of required courses (including coursework that may have been counted towards another Psychology degree), may also be requested to be included as part of the official VCU academic history for documentation purposes.
Waiver of Requirement

Some students may not be able to transfer credits to VCU (e.g., credits already used for a previous degree) or may not desire to do so. However, such students may wish to have requirements waived based on past graduate work equivalent to coursework required in his/her VCU psychology department graduate program. Such students may request a waiver of course requirements once a student has accepted admission into a VCU psychology department graduate program. The student’s advisor must initiate formal evaluation of transfer credits after review and evaluation of courses with the student. Students may be asked to provide syllabi, course outlines, catalog descriptions, and other course materials to facilitate the evaluation of coursework. This information will be submitted to an instructor who teaches a comparable course at VCU or, in case such a person is not available, the student’s program director. For a course requirement to be waived, a student must have earned an "A" or "B" grade from an accredited institution or university. The Waiver Request Approval Form requires the signature of the instructor and/or program director. The form should be submitted with a transcript listing the course by the student's Program Director to the Director of Graduate Studies.

Time Limit for Completion of the Degree

Candidates must complete all requirements for the M.S. degree within four (4) years of their date of admission to the graduate program, which is more stringent than University requirements, and all requirements for the Ph.D. degree within eight (8) years of their date of admission to the graduate program. Students may apply for an extension to either limit via email or letter to his/her Program Director. The request is considered by the following individuals/groups in this order:

a) the Program/Division and
b) the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS)

If both approve, then the DGS submits the request to the Executive Associate Dean of the College of Humanities and Sciences.

Policy on Continuous Enrollment

Once admitted, a graduate student must enroll each semester (excluding summers) until the degree is awarded. Graduate students who have been admitted to candidacy for a degree, or who have completed course requirements for a degree, must register for a minimum of one semester hour each semester, excluding summer session, until the degree is awarded. Failure to maintain a continuous registration will result in dismissal from the program and the student can only be reinstated through formal reapplication. Students who are unable to register must apply for a leave of absence (described later) by contacting their Director of Graduate Studies. Summer enrollment may be required in some programs.

Full-Time Graduate Status

Full-time graduate status shall consist of a minimum of 9 and a maximum of 15 credits per semester. No more than 12 credits may be earned during the summer session.

Outside Employment Policy

Students in any program who are funded by a Graduate Teaching Assistantship, a Graduate Research Assistantship, or a Doctoral Assistantship may seek an additional position only with the approval of his/her
academic advisor and the Director of Graduate Studies during the period of the Assistantship. Read the policy on second jobs. Failure to follow the policy may result in loss of funding, including tuition payments.

Students in the Clinical and Counseling Psychology Programs who are employed in applied psychological work must abide by all Program requirements and may only participate in program-approved practicum experiences. Read the policy on practicum registration requirements. Students on an approved leave of absence may be exempt from this policy.

### Leaves of Absence

Students may request leaves of absence from their Graduate Program Committee. Requests for a leave of absence that are approved by the Program Committee must also be approved by the Psychology Department's Graduate Committee, the Dean of the College of Humanities and Sciences, and the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies.

Such leaves will only be granted under approved circumstances and normally shall not exceed one year in length. Policies of the VCU Graduate School indicate that the time a student is on an approved leave of absence DOES count in the calculation of time requirements for the degree (i.e., the clock does NOT pause).

### Student Evaluation and Feedback

The Ph.D. represents the highest academic degree awarded in psychology. The faculty members hold the responsibility to ensure that all recipients of this degree meet high standards of competence across the domains required by this field of study. Whereas each program may have more specific criteria for evaluating students, the following domains are considered important by all doctoral programs:

1. **Academic Performance.** Minimal performance criteria are delineated in the Graduate Bulletin for your program. In addition to these criteria, students’ class performance should reflect a high level of scholarship. Graduate students are expected to show a high level of initiative and self-reliance in pursuing their academic coursework. Grades and other feedback from instructors (e.g., evaluation of written work and class participation) should clearly indicate that the student is doing more than just the minimum quality and quantity of work required to receive passing grades.

2. **Professional Competence.** Evaluation in this area is based primarily on the student's practicum performance (i.e., PSY 690, 693, 694, 695, 795). Minimum standards for performance depend on the student's professional goals. More specific criteria for performance in this area are determined by the student's Graduate Program Committee.

3. **Research Interest, Competence and Progress.** Although the student's thesis project often reflects a collaborative effort of the student and his or her advisor, it is expected that the student will make some independent contributions to this project. The dissertation should be a substantial research project of the student's own design, and should reflect a high level of professional maturity and competence. Students are expected to complete their theses and dissertations in a timely manner. In addition to the formal requirements for thesis and dissertation research, students are expected to maintain continual research activity during their tenure at VCU. The student's research efforts should be of publishable quality and make a contribution to the field of psychology. Each student should prepare and submit his or her thesis and dissertation research for publication when deemed appropriate by their research advisor. Research advisors generally are involved in this process and share authorship of such publications.
4. **Ethical Behavior.** Students should have a full grasp of all ethical principles that apply to any activities in which they may become involved. Students are required to be aware of and adhere to the [APA Ethical Standards of Psychologists](https://www.apa.org/ethics/) and the [VCU Academic Integrity Policy](https://www.vcu.edu/student-affairs/academic-integrity-policy/). Students should also adhere to the additional ethical guidelines for research that are published in Section VII of this handbook, and students must understand and comply with [Institutional Review Board](https://vcrib.org/) (IRB) and/or [VCU Animal Care and Use Program](https://www.vcu.edu/animal-resources/) policies in conducting research. In summary, the student should be able to clearly operationalize and conform to all relevant ethical principles related to her or his professional or research activities and should readily seek professional consultation and feedback when appropriate.

5. **Commitment and Contribution to the Program, Department and Profession.** Students should show evidence of constructive involvement in the graduate programs and department. Involvement would be evidenced by such behavior as:
   a. consulting with other students and faculty
   b. initiating activities that would be conducive to the growth of other students and faculty
   c. attendance at colloquia and other department activities
   d. participation in other extra-classroom activities sponsored by the psychology department

Commitment to graduate study would be evidenced by other behaviors such as completing papers in a conscientious and timely manner, regular and timely classroom attendance, and evidence of some pursuit of knowledge beyond minimal curricular requirements.

Although the interpretation of the above criteria may vary somewhat depending on the student's area of study and career goals, students are required to show satisfactory progress in each of the above areas to remain in good standing in the program.

Insufficient performance in a single area may be grounds for terminating a student from the program independent of their performance in any other criterion areas. To ensure that students' performance in each of these areas is evaluated and that students receive adequate and timely feedback on their progress through the program, each student will be regularly evaluated by their Graduate Program Committee throughout their tenure at VCU. The specific time points for these evaluations and procedures are described in each program-specific handbook.

**Probation and Dismissal from the Program**

If a student's Graduate Program Committee determines that the student's performance in one or more criterion area is deficient, they may elect either to dismiss the student from the program or to place the student on probation.

If the deficiency is judged to be sufficiently severe, the student may be immediately dismissed from the program.

If the performance deficiency is judged to be remediable, a plan will be developed with the student to remediate his/her performance deficiencies. This remediation plan will describe the nature of the student's problems, the expected behavior patterns or goals of the plan, possible methods for accomplishing these goals, and a date for re-evaluating the student. The student will be considered to be on probation during this remedial period. The success of the remediation plan will be evaluated by the student's Graduate Program Committee at or near the specified date. On the basis of this evaluation the Committee may:
a) decide that the specific problem is no longer a significant one and continue the student in the program,
b) develop a further remedial plan and date for re-evaluation and continue the student on probation,
c) suggest that the student pursue other career objectives, or
d) when the student has failed to meet the remedial goals and there is no expectation she or he will be able to meet them in the immediate future, she or he may be formally dismissed from the program

**Ombudspersons**

Occasionally, students and/or faculty members have issues with another member of the department that are not easily addressed through informal channels. To facilitate constructive resolution of such problems, the Department will identify two or more members of the department to serve as ombudspersons each academic year. Persons with complaints may contact one of these appointees, whose job is to problem solve with the grieved party to help him or her deal with the issue and with the other department member involved. An ombudsperson will involve the program director and/or Chair only if informal methods of intervention do not resolve the issue.

**Graduate Student Appeal Procedure**

Graduate students in the College of Humanities and Sciences at VCU have the right to appeal actions of an academic nature that they believe are unjustified. If such action involves a course grade, the [University Grade Review Procedures](#) should be followed. In those cases that do not involve course grades, please consult with the Graduate Director for the appropriate process to follow.

In any case, the student should first attempt to resolve the matter with the individuals involved. If the student continues to believe that the grade or action is unjustified the student may choose to initiate a formal appeal procedure.

**Graduate Student Grievance Procedures**

**Definitions**

**Grievance**

For the purposes of this document and the policies of this Department, a grievance shall include, but is not restricted to, a complaint by a graduate student in a doctoral program in the Department of Psychology: that he or she has been subjected to a violation, misinterpretation, or inequitable application of any of the regulations of the Department of Psychology at VCU; or that he or she has been treated unfairly or inequitably by reason of any act or condition that is contrary to established policy or practice governing or affecting graduate students at VCU.

**Boundaries of this Policy**

This policy applies only to grievances related to Departmental policies and/or that involve Department of Psychology faculty and/or staff members. Grievances related to College, Graduate School, or University and/or faculty and/or staff members from other VCU departments or units may not be governed by this policy and the student should consult with relevant College, Graduate School, and/or University policies. It is the responsibility of ALL graduate students and faculty in the Department of Psychology to be familiar with the [Graduate Bulletin](#) as well as the academic regulations of the College of Humanities and Sciences and the Department of Psychology. In all cases, the official policies and procedures of the University
Steps for Reporting a Grievance

1. **First step: Resolve directly with affected individuals.** The first step for handling a grievance a graduate student has with a faculty member in the Department is for the student to make every effort to settle this with the faculty member directly. Students who feel they need help with this first step may elicit the help of any of the following individuals in the Department:
   a. Program Director
   b. Director of Graduate Studies
   c. Chair
   d. Departmental Ombudspersons

2. **Second step: Refer to Program Committee.** If the grievance cannot be resolved at the first step, the student is to submit a written report of the grievance to their Program Committee (e.g., Clinical, Counseling, Developmental, Social, Health, etc.). This report should contain, insofar as possible, all the pertinent information, steps already taken by the student, resolutions desired, etc. The Program Committee will consider this report and take any action it deems appropriate, which may include asking the student to discuss the problem further with the Program Committee.

   If a student’s grievance involves an individual faculty member, that faculty member will be offered the opportunity to provide information to the Program Committee regarding the conflict. The faculty member will be free to respond to or refuse such a request. On the basis of information obtained from the student and faculty member, the Program Committee will attempt to make specific recommendations regarding possible solutions to the student and faculty member.

   If the student is concerned that the Program Committee will not provide a fair hearing (e.g., faculty member concerned is a member of the Program Committee), the student may choose to bring the grievance directly to the Graduate Academic Committee (GAC; see Step 3).

3. **Third step: Refer to Graduate Academic Committee (GAC).** If the Program Committee is unable to provide recommendations, or if the faculty member or student chooses to appeal the Program Committee’s decision, the Program Committee will present a written report of any deliberations completed to the GAC. On the basis of information obtained from the Program Committee’s report, the student and faculty member, the GAC will attempt to make specific recommendations regarding possible solutions to the student and faculty member. The GAC may request to meet with the student and/or the faculty member.

4. **Fourth step: Refer to Department Chair and ad hoc Grievance Committee.** If the GAC is unable to provide recommendations, or if the faculty member or student chooses to appeal the GAC’s decision, the GAC will present a written report of any deliberations completed to the Department Chair and s/he will convene an ad hoc Grievance Committee (GC). The composition of the committee should be such that none of the individuals from earlier steps are involved. On the basis of information obtained from the GAC’s report, the student and faculty member, the GC will attempt to make specific recommendations regarding possible solutions to the student and faculty member. The GC may request to meet with the student and/or the faculty member.
5. **Fifth step: Refer to VCU College of Humanities and Sciences.** If the GC is unable to provide recommendations, the student is advised to confer with the Dean of the College of Humanities and Sciences.

**Additional Notes**

Although the Department encourages students to attempt to resolve grievances via the procedure outlined above, students may also choose to file grievances with the appropriate College, Graduate School, or University Committees.
The Master of Science (M.S.) Degree

Master’s Thesis

Students are required to complete a master's thesis as part of the M.S. degree requirements. The thesis should represent a joint project of both the research advisor (thesis committee chair) and the student. The student's research advisor may take a major role in any aspect of the thesis development, with the student maintaining an apprenticeship role in the enterprise. In most cases, the student will take the major role in actual data collection and analysis. Ideally, the thesis should be publishable and thereby make a contribution to the field of psychology. The students and faculty should discuss authorship, including order of authorship, on publications coming out of the thesis and in all cases should be in compliance with APA guidelines regarding authorship.

The department has developed an online document, reviewed and updated regularly, outlining the steps toward completing the thesis: Thesis Steps.

Waiver of Thesis Requirement

Students who have previously completed a master's thesis in psychology at another university may have the thesis requirement waived if the thesis is accepted by their Graduate Program Committee. The waiver process described earlier should be completed. Note that if the thesis requirement is waived, the student will NOT receive an MS degree from VCU but s/he will need to complete all other MS degree requirements.

Thesis Credits

Students should be registered for thesis research (PSYC 798) during any semester they are involved in the planning, running, or writing of their thesis. It is expected that students will begin work on their thesis (and consequently register for thesis credits) during the Spring Semester following their admission to the graduate program, and continue to sign up for thesis credits until their thesis is completed. The number of credits of PSYC 798 to be signed up for in any given semester should accurately reflect the amount of time dedicated to working on the thesis, with 3 hours per week per credit hour serving as a general guideline. The exact number of thesis hours taken by any given student will, in part, reflect differences in the nature of the research they conduct and their timetable. There is no upper limit on the number of thesis credits students may take while pursuing their degree as long as the student receives a grade of "S" for each credit. However, a minimum of 6 credits is required and no more than 6 credits may be counted toward the degree.

Evaluation of Thesis Progress

Students should set goals with their research advisor for each semester they are registered for thesis credits. To facilitate this process, it is recommended that students complete a Goals for Thesis Research Activity Form at the beginning of each semester they are registered for thesis credits. This form is intended to clarify both the student's and advisor's expectations regarding work on the thesis for that semester. This work will normally include regular scheduled meetings with the advisor, where the advisor will provide guidance and planning for each step of the thesis. At the end of the semester students should meet with their research advisor to review their progress on the thesis. Students receive a grade of "S,"
"U," or "F" from their research advisors for each semester they are registered for PSYC 798. Consistent with Graduate School policy, students who receive a grade of "U" in any thesis work will be reviewed for possible termination. Receipt of a grade of "F" for PSYC 798 constitutes grounds for dismissal from the program.

**Time Requirements for Thesis**

It is expected that students will submit their thesis proposal to their committee during the Fall Semester of their second year in the program; and that students will complete their final thesis orals no later than the last day of formal classes for the spring semester of their second year. If the thesis has not been completed prior to the fifth semester of graduate study (i.e., start of the third year), the following guidelines will be used for allowing students to take didactic courses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of Thesis Completion</th>
<th>Max. No. of Course Credits Allowed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data collected and analyzed</td>
<td>9 credit hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collected, but not analyzed</td>
<td>6 credit hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposal approved, but incomplete data collection</td>
<td>3 credit hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposal not yet approved</td>
<td>0 credit hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Beginning in the Spring of the 3rd year, **no more than three credit hours** of didactic courses may be taken if the thesis has not been completed (i.e., defended).

Note that the above restrictions apply to didactic course credit hours only and do not include thesis research credits (PSYC 798) or practicum (693/694). Thesis progress is an important criterion in evaluating students' progress in the program and is also considered in assigning departmental assistantships and financial support.

If a student has registered for inappropriate courses/credits considering the status of his/her thesis, the student will be administratively withdrawn from such courses/credits. It is the student’s responsibility to then replace these credit hours if necessary to maintain either or both their full-time status in the program or standing as a recipient of an assistantship, fellowship, or other type of funding award.

**Thesis Committee**

**Committee Chair**

The student should select a full-time member of the Psychology Department and VCU Graduate Faculty to serve as Chair of the Thesis Committee. This individual should have a doctoral degree in Psychology, and either

1. a primary faculty appointment in the Department of Psychology, OR
2. a primary faculty appointment in another VCU Department and a joint appointment in Psychology.
If s/he is not a Psychology faculty member, a Psychology Department faculty member must serve as co-chair.

**Other Members**

The committee should have at least 3 members (including the chair) such that all five of the following criteria are true.

1. at least one member must hold an appointment in the student’s program,
2. at least 2 must hold faculty appointments in Psychology (regular, collateral, or joint),
3. every member of the committee **must** hold VCU Graduate Faculty appointment.
4. 1 member must hold a faculty appointment at VCU, but this individual’s primary appointment should **NOT** be in the Department of Psychology
5. all members must hold doctoral level degrees.

The non-department member may be an affiliate member of the department.

**Process**

The approval of the thesis committee involves receiving a recommendation for approval from the student’s advisor, Program Director, and the Director of Graduate Studies. The Executive Associate Dean of the College of Humanities and Sciences approves and thus appoints the committee. The committee must be formally convened prior to conducting the thesis research, and students should allow 10 working days prior to their committee meetings for administrative processing. Approval is sought electronically (read the online document summarizing the steps). The student must gain the consent of all individuals identified for the committee prior to their being named to the committee.

If a student wants a person not on faculty at VCU to serve on the committee (for example, someone on faculty at another college or a professional in the community), and the individual is not already a member of the VCU Graduate Faculty, the student must petition the Graduate Director to request that this individual be permitted to serve. The petition must include a rationale and supporting evidence of scholarly training (e.g., vita). If the Graduate Director approves the student’s request, he or she must then formally ask the Executive Associate Dean of Humanities and Sciences to permit this individual to sit on the committee. This individual serves as an additional member of the committee, rather than taking the place of any of the original three committee members.

Changes in the membership of a Thesis Committee are accomplished by first, formally dissolving the existing committee, and then constituting a new committee by means of the procedures described above. The **Request for Dissolution of Thesis Committee Form** must be submitted to the Program Director and the Director of Graduate Studies, whose signatures will indicate their recommendation for the proposed action. Recommendation against the proposed action is implied by the absence of a signature on this form when it is submitted to a higher level. The Executive Associate Dean of the College of Humanities and Sciences will approve or disapprove the dissolution. The wishes of the Committee Chair will normally be paramount, but a committee member should not be removed unwillingly in the absence of valid reasons.

**Proposal Requirements**

Students will write a proposal that conforms to APA publication standards and will design a study that has been (or will be) approved by the VCU IRB.
The proposal should include the following sections:

I) Introduction, usually including but not limited to:
   - Description of the relevant literature
   - Conceptual basis or framework for the study
   - Statement of the problem
   - Hypotheses

II) Proposed Method:
   - Selection of subjects
   - Materials
   - Procedure
   - Data Analysis Plan

III) References

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**Proposal Meeting**

Copies of the proposal must be submitted to all committee members at least two weeks prior to the scheduled proposal meeting (unless otherwise arranged) for their review. This meeting shall be open to all VCU faculty and Psychology Department graduate students, and must be announced in the departmental calendar at least one week prior to its being held. The Committee Chair may request that non committee members leave at any point during the meeting, as appropriate. All committee members should be present at this meeting, and the Chair must be present. No more than one member may be absent, and he/she must be represented by proxy or by written comments that normally would be submitted prior to the meeting. Meetings should be scheduled in one of the Department meeting rooms or an acceptable alternative. If the proposal does not meet with the committee's approval, they may elect to hold an additional proposal meeting. Approval of the thesis proposal by the committee must be unanimous.

Once the committee has approved the proposal, the Thesis Proposal Signature Form should be signed by all the committee members and submitted electronically to the Director of Graduate Studies and to his/her Program Committee Director prior to commencing the thesis research.

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**Thesis Format**

Theses should be written to comply with the University Graduate Thesis and Dissertation Manual. Students may obtain a copy of this manual from the Graduate Studies Office located at 1001 Grove Avenue or a copy can be downloaded using the link. In addition to the thesis document itself, students must prepare a VCU Graduate School Electronic Thesis & Dissertation Form (found here: ETD).

In addition, the Psychology Department requires that the references and other aspects of style be consistent with the latest edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. Students are responsible for being familiar with Departmental and Graduate School requirements on format.

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**Thesis Defense**

Students will conduct the thesis research and write the final thesis document with the guidance of their thesis advisors. When the committee chair deems the thesis paper ready, a defense meeting is scheduled. Committee members must receive a final draft of the thesis at least two weeks prior to the scheduled
meeting (unless otherwise arranged). This meeting shall be open to all VCU faculty and Psychology Department graduate students, and must be announced in the departmental calendar at least one week prior to its being held. Other guests may attend only with the student’s and the Chair’s consent. All committee members should be present at this meeting, and the Chair must be present. No more than one member may be absent, and he/she must be represented by proxy or by written comments, which normally would be submitted prior to the meeting. Meetings should be scheduled in one of the Department meeting rooms or an acceptable alternative.

Also note that if a student intends to graduate in the semester in which s/he is defending, she must schedule the defense at least two weeks prior to the final date for ETD submissions on the VCU Academic Calendar.

Students will be expected to present their findings and conclusions during this meeting and to answer questions and discuss issues raised by committee members. At the end of the formal defense, the student will be excused and the committee will confer in closed session to evaluate both the written proposal and the student’s oral defense. Students must perform satisfactorily in both areas to have the thesis approved. If the committee concludes that the student's performance on the orals exam was not satisfactory, it may recommend that the student be given a second opportunity for an oral defense. With respect to the student's written work, the committee may find it acceptable in its current form, acceptable pending specific revisions, or unacceptable. The thesis must be approved by members of the committee with no more than one negative vote. Approval is signified by signing the VCU Graduate School Electronic Thesis & Dissertation Approval Form (ETD). There are normally some changes that the committee requests. The chair of the committee should not sign the VCU Graduate School Electronic Thesis & Dissertation Approval Form (ETD) until he or she has read and approved the final copy, signifying that all required changes were made satisfactorily. Other committee members may sign, or decline to sign, at the end of the meeting, before the changes are made. A committee member who votes to disapprove the thesis may provide a written dissenting opinion to be included in the final version of the thesis.

Guidelines for the Final Process of Thesis Completion

As noted earlier, the Department has developed a document that includes all of the steps involved in the completion of the thesis; the document can be found online: Thesis Steps.

The steps listed here occur after the thesis defense and must be followed in sequence. Students must allow sufficient time to complete all of the following steps by the deadline for turning final copies of the thesis to the VCU Digital Archive. In addition to the guidelines provided here, students are encouraged to read the Graduate Bulletin to ensure that all academic procedures are being followed.

A note about bound copies: Neither the Department, the College, nor the University requires a bound copy of the thesis. However, a student’s advisor and/or Program may request a bound copy. Students are encouraged to determine whether or not their advisors request a bound copy and to make arrangements accordingly.

1. **Signature: Director of Graduate Studies.** Student should forward the ETD to the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), who reviews and signs the ETD on behalf of the Psychology Department.

   NOTE: It may take up to five working days for department-level approval; students are encouraged to plan accordingly.
2. **Signatures: College and Graduate School Deans.** The DGS will retain a scanned copy of the ETD and then forward the original form to the College Dean’s office for his/her signature. After the appropriate Dean in the College has signed the form, s/he will forward the **ETD Form** to the Dean of Graduate Studies for his/her signature. A copy of the signed ETD Form is returned to the Department and kept in the student files. This process may take up to five business days so students should plan accordingly to ensure they meet their timeline (e.g., for graduation).

3. **Final Version Submitted to the VCU Digital Archives.** A final version of the approved thesis must be submitted to the **VCU Scholar's Compass.** In addition, students may choose (but are not required) to submit their thesis to the **ProQuest/UMI database.** Neither of these processes requires payment by the student, except if the student wants some additional services. There is good information about submitting electronic theses and dissertations as well as the relevant charges at the following website: **Thesis Resources.**

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## Applying for Graduation

Deadlines for completion of graduation requirements (including graduation application, thesis defense) are listed in the **University Calendar** published in the **Graduate Bulletin.** The department has developed an online document, reviewed and updated regularly, outlining the steps toward completing the graduation process: **Graduation Steps.** The student completes an electronic graduation checkout on e-services and downloads the graduation application. There is no graduation fee. The application is completed by the student, signed by the advisor, reviewed by the Associate Director for Academic Operations, signed by the Director of Graduate Studies, and then forwarded to the College Dean's Office. Note that in completing the graduation application for the master's degree, students should list the department core courses and other courses up to the total required number of credit hours (i.e., do not include more credit hours than those required for the degree). All M.S. courses, whether required or not, are included in computing grade point average.
The Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) Degree

Requesting Continuation in the Doctoral Program

After completion of all M.S. degree requirements (including the thesis defense), and prior to commencing any work on the Ph.D., students must submit a doctoral plan of study and formally request continuation into the doctoral program (programs may use different forms, so students should confer with their Program Directors). Continuation forms should be submitted to the student's Graduate Program Director. The student's Graduate Program Committee will review the plan of study and request for continuation and will approve or disapprove the plan of study and request. Continuation in the doctoral program is not automatic.

Continuation Forms

- Clinical Program Continuation Form
- Counseling Program Continuation Form
- Developmental Program Continuation Form
- Social Program Continuation Form
- Health Program Continuation Form (see program director)

Doctoral Candidacy and Preliminary Examination

A written preliminary examination must be passed for a student to become a doctoral candidate. Students may not take this exam until they have completed their master’s degree and have been formally approved for continuation into the doctoral program. The exam is normally taken prior to proposing the dissertation. The exam must be passed prior to defense of the dissertation. The examination will be a written examination and will cover material relevant to the student's degree program. The format of the exam is set by the individual program. Each program is obligated to provide guidance for the student well in advance of the examination (e.g., list of topics or reading list). Specific details regarding the scheduling of the examination, material to be covered, and evaluation procedures are provided in the individual program handbooks. Any student who fails the first administration of prelims will be given the opportunity to retake the exam. The retake procedures are determined by program. If the examination is failed a second time, the student will be terminated from the program.

Ph.D. Dissertation

A dissertation requiring the planning, completion, and defense of an original empirical research project is an integral part of the Ph.D. program. The dissertation shall be of such quality as to warrant publication. The students and faculty should discuss authorship, including co-authorship (if any) and order of authorship, on publications coming out of the dissertation and in all cases should be in compliance with APA guidelines regarding authorship.

The department has developed an online document, reviewed and updated regularly, outlining the steps toward completing the dissertation: Dissertation Steps.
**Dissertation Credits**

Students should be registered for doctoral dissertation research (PSYC 898) during any semester they are actively involved in the planning, running, or writing of their dissertation. The number of credits of PSYC 898 to be signed up for in any given semester should accurately reflect the amount of time dedicated to working on the dissertation, with 3 hours per week per credit hour serving as a general guideline. The exact number of dissertation hours taken by any given student will, in part, reflect differences in the nature of the research they conduct and their timetable. There is no upper limit on the number of dissertation credits a student may take while pursuing their degree. However, a minimum of 12 credits is required and no more than 12 credits may be counted toward the degree.

**NOTE:** To enroll in PSYC 898, students must have:

a) completed the master’s degree and  
b) been approved for continuation.

Any student who violates this policy will be charged with an honor’s violation.

**Evaluation of Dissertation Progress**

Students should set goals with their research advisor for each semester they are registered for dissertation credits. To facilitate this process, it is recommended that the student and research advisor complete a goal form at the beginning of each semester the student is registered for dissertation credits. This form is intended to clarify both the student's and advisor's expectations regarding work on the dissertation for that semester. Students should have regular meetings with the advisor for advice and guidance throughout the dissertation process. At the end of the semester students should meet with their research advisor to review their progress on the dissertation.

Students receive a grade of Satisfactory "S," Unsatisfactory "U," or Fail "F" from their research advisor for each semester they are registered for PSYC 898. Students who receive a grade of "U" in any dissertation work will be reviewed for possible termination whereas a grade of "F" for PSYC 898 is grounds for dismissal from the program.

**Dissertation Committee**

The student should select a full-time member of the Psychology Department and VCU Graduate Faculty to serve as Chair of the Dissertation Committee. This individual should have a doctoral degree in Psychology, and either:

1. a primary faculty appointment in the Department of Psychology OR  
2. a primary faculty appointment in another VCU Department and a joint appointment in Psychology.

If he or she is not a Psychology faculty member, a Psychology Department faculty member must serve as co-chair.

The committee should have at least 5 members (including the chair) such that meet ALL of the following criteria:

1. at least one member must hold an appointment in the student’s program,  
2. at least 3 must hold faculty appointments in Psychology (regular, collateral, or joint),
3. every member of the committee must hold an appointment in the VCU Graduate Faculty.
4. 1 member must hold a faculty appointment at VCU, but this individual’s primary appointment should NOT be in the Department of Psychology,
5. all members must hold doctoral level degrees.

The non-department member may be an affiliate member of the department.

Process

The approval of the dissertation committee involves receiving a recommendation for approval from the student’s advisor, Program Director, and the Director of Graduate Studies. The Executive Associate Dean of the College of Humanities and Sciences approves and thus appoints the committee. The committee must be formally convened prior to conducting the thesis research, and students should allow 10 working days prior to their committee meetings for administrative processing. Approval is sought electronically and the steps are summarized in an online document: Guidance on forming committees. The student must gain the consent of all individuals identified for the committee prior to their being named to the committee.

If a student wants a person not on faculty at VCU to serve on the committee (for example, someone on faculty at another college or a professional in the community), and the individual is not already a member of the VCU Graduate Faculty, the student must petition the Graduate Director to request that this individual be permitted to serve. The petition must include a rationale and supporting evidence of scholarly training (e.g., vita). If the Graduate Director approves the student’s request, the Executive Associate Dean of Humanities and Sciences must also approve the request. This individual can serve as the fifth member of the committee.

Changes in the membership of a Dissertation Committee are accomplished by, first, formally dissolving the existing committee, and then constituting a new committee by means of the procedures described above. Formal dissolution of a committee requires that the Request for Dissolution of Dissertation Committee Form be submitted to the Program Director and the Director of Graduate Studies, whose signatures will indicate their recommendation for the proposed action. Recommendation against the proposed action is implied by the absence of a signature on this form when it is submitted to a higher level. The Executive Associate Dean of the College of Humanities and Sciences will approve or disapprove the dissolution. The wishes of the Committee Chair will normally be paramount, but a committee member should not be removed unwillingly in the absence of valid reasons.

Proposal Meeting

Copies of the dissertation proposal must be submitted to all committee members for their review at least two weeks (unless otherwise arranged) in advance of the proposal meeting. This meeting shall be open to all VCU faculty and Psychology Department graduate students, and must be announced in the departmental calendar at least one week prior to its being held. The Chair may request that non-members leave at any point during the meeting, as appropriate. All committee members should be present at this meeting, and the Chair must be present. No more than one member may be absent, and he/she must be represented by proxy or by written comments, normally would be submitted prior to the meeting. Meetings should be scheduled in one of the Department meeting rooms or an acceptable alternative. If the proposal does not meet with the committee's approval, they may elect to hold an additional proposal meeting.
Once the proposal has been approved by the committee, the Dissertation Proposal Signature Form should be signed by all the committee members and submitted to the Director of Graduate Studies prior to commencing the dissertation research. Approval of the dissertation proposal by the committee must be unanimous.

**Program Guidelines for Dissertation**

Some flexibility exists within the clinical and counseling programs as to when a student initiates and completes her or his dissertation research. However, students are strongly urged to complete their doctoral dissertation before going on internship. Also note that students must be continuously enrolled each Fall and Spring Semester until the degree has been received (see Policy on Continuous Enrollment). This enrollment may be, for example, just one hour of dissertation credit.

**Dissertation Defense**

Students will conduct and write the dissertation independently, though with guidance from their dissertation advisor. Copies of the completed dissertation must be submitted to all committee members for their review at least two weeks prior to the scheduled meeting (unless otherwise arranged). The meeting shall be open to all VCU faculty and Psychology Department graduate students. The meeting date and the dissertation abstract must be submitted for listing the departmental calendar at least two weeks prior to its being held. Guests may attend only with the student’s and the Chair’s consent. All committee members should be present at this meeting, and the Chair must be present. No more than one member may be absent, and he/she must be represented by proxy or by written comments, which normally would be submitted prior to the meeting. Meetings should be scheduled in one of the Department meeting rooms or an acceptable alternative.

Also note that if a student intends to graduate in the semester in which s/he is defending, she must schedule the defense at least two weeks prior to the final date for ETD signatures found on the VCU Academic Calendar.

Students will be expected to present their findings and conclusions during this meeting and to answer questions and discuss issues raised by committee members. At the end of the formal defense, the student is asked to step outside while the committee confers in closed session to evaluate both the written proposal and the student’s oral defense.

Students must perform satisfactorily in both areas in order to have the dissertation approved. If the committee concludes that the student's performance on the orals exam was not satisfactory, it may recommend that the student be given a second opportunity for an oral defense. With respect to the student's written work, the committee may find it acceptable in its current form, acceptable pending specific revisions, or unacceptable. The dissertation must be approved by members of the committee with no more than one negative vote. Approval is signified by signing the ETD Form. There are normally some changes that the committee requests. The chair of the committee should not sign the ETD Form until he or she has read the final copy. Other committee members may sign, or decline to sign, at the end of the meeting, before the changes are made. A committee member disapproving may provide a written dissenting opinion to include in the final version of the dissertation.
Guidelines for the Final Process of Dissertation Completion

As noted earlier, the Department has developed a document that includes all of the steps involved in the completion of the dissertation; the document can be found online: Dissertation Steps.

The steps listed here occur after the dissertation defense and must be followed in sequence. Note that all steps must occur after:

a) the dissertation has been approved by the student's committee and
b) all revisions and corrections have been made and approved by the student’s advisor.

In other words, the dissertation MUST be in its final form. Students must allow sufficient time to complete all of the following steps by the deadline for turning final copies of the dissertation to the VCU Digital Archive and ProQuest/UMI. In addition to the guidelines provided here, students are encouraged to read information from the VCU Graduate Bulletin.

A note about bound copies: Neither the Department, the College, nor the University requires a bound copy of the dissertation. However, a student’s advisor and/or Program may request a bound copy. Students are encouraged to determine whether or not their advisors request a bound copy and to make arrangements accordingly.

1. **Signature: Director of Graduate Studies.** The student delivers a hard copy of the ETD Form and an electronic version of the dissertation to the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS). The DGS will review and approve all dissertations. After review, s/he will sign the ETD Form on behalf of the Psychology Department. It may take up to five working days for the department-level approval. Students are encouraged to plan accordingly.

2. **Signatures: College and Graduate School Deans.** The DGS will forward the form to the College Dean’s office for his/her signature. After the appropriate Dean in the College has signed the form, s/he will forward the ETD Form to the Dean of Graduate Studies for his/her signature. A copy of the signed ETD Form is returned to the Department and kept in the student files. These steps may take up to five working days; students are encouraged to plan accordingly.

3. **Final Version Submitted to the VCU Digital Archives and ProQuest/UMI.** A final version of the approved dissertation must be submitted to the VCU Scholars Compass. In addition, students are required to submit their dissertation to the ProQuest/UMI database. Neither of these processes requires payment by the student, except if the student wants some additional services. The VCU Graduate School offers good information about submitting electronic dissertations and charges relevant to them.

Applying for Graduation

Deadlines for completion of graduation requirements (including graduation application, and dissertation defense) are listed in the University Calendar published in the Graduate Bulletin. The student completes an electronic graduation checkout on e-services and downloads the graduation application. The application is filled out by the student, signed by the advisor, reviewed by the Associate Director for Academic Operations signed by the Director of Graduate Studies and then forwarded to the Dean's Office. Note that in completing the graduation application for the Ph.D., students should not include courses listed on their M.S. graduation application. All graduate courses attempted are included in

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calculation of grade point average, regardless of whether or not they are required courses. This includes both grades for repeated courses. See the forms folder for a checklist of requirements for the Ph.D. degree. This checklist should be signed by the student's advisor and should be turned in to the Department with the graduation application. If the student does not complete the degree requirements by the date set on the application, she or he will need to submit a second application. The department has developed an online document, reviewed and updated regularly, outlining the steps toward completing the graduation process: Graduation Steps.
Financial Support

General Guidelines for Graduate Student Support

Graduate students in the department are funded via a number of sources. A primary source of funding is the College of Humanities and Sciences; funding from the college comes via Graduate Teaching Assistantships (GTA). In addition, the department receives several Doctoral Assistantships (DA) from the Graduate School. Research grants and contracts are another major source of funding for graduate students in our department, generally in the form of a Graduate Research Assistantship (GRA). Thus, each year the department works to fund as many students as possible. In general, funding via GTA, GRA, or DA are prioritized for students in their first through fourth years of study, as we guarantee funding across the first four years.

All newly admitted and continuing students in any of the department’s programs are considered unless one of the following occurs:

- The student has indicated she/he is not interested
- Academic performance is poor
- Past assistantship performance was rated unsatisfactory
- Student is not full-time in the program
- Student admitted to program as “non-funded”

Graduate Teaching Assistantships & Doctoral Assistantships

Continuing graduate students who express interest in funding are considered for Graduate Teaching Assistantships and Doctoral Assistantships offered each year by the Psychology Department. Most assistantships are for the academic year and all carry a workload of about 20 hours per week. GTAs and DAs are similar in most respects. The primary differences are:

a) funding for DAs come from the Graduate School and funding for GTAs comes from the College;
b) DAs are always 12-month positions whereas GTAs are usually 9-month positions, and
c) DAs are only available for first year students.

Work assignments of DAs and GTAs vary and typically involve one of the following:

- staffing the PSYC 101 courses
- assisting a faculty member who teaches a course with a large enrollment
- teaching a laboratory section or recitation section associated with an undergraduate course
- teaching a laboratory associated with a graduate course
- serving as an instructor with full responsibility for teaching a course (requires completion of the Master's degree)
- staffing one of the service positions within the department (e.g., CPSD assistants, academic advisors in the Psychology Undergraduate Advising Office, assistant to one of the program directors in the department)

Graduate Teaching Assistants receive a stipend plus tuition (for a full course load, min. 9 credits, max. 15 credits, per semester; student tuition will not be covered for more than 15 credits) for in-state (and usually for out-of-state) students. GTAs are responsible for paying all fees.
Stipend rates are updated in this guidance document each year.

Each spring semester, the Director of Graduate Studies requests that all students inform him/her about their funding aspirations for the following academic year. The following procedures will be used to determine GTA & DA assignments:

1. Interested students must indicate interest in receiving funding via a GTA or DA.
2. The Chair, Director of Graduate Studies, Director of Undergraduate Studies, and Associate Director of Academic Operations will review all students indicating interest and assign as many students as possible to the funding slots available. Selections will be made based on a combination of the following criteria:
   a. Students' progress and standing in their program, particularly thesis progress
   b. Suitability for the positions available
   c. Financial need.
   d. Student’s year in the program, with priority to students in the first three years of graduate study.
3. Applicants will be notified in writing of their assignments.
4. All assignments will be reviewed at the beginning of each semester. Occasionally, changes in specific assignments may be needed to accommodate changes in teaching schedules, fill vacancies, and to ensure that there is some comparability in workloads across assistantships.

Assistantships generally start in the Fall semester and run through the end of the Spring semester. Specific dates will be provided for each assignment. GTAs and DAs should contact the supervisor to whom they have been assigned as soon as possible after they are notified of their assignment. GTAs and DAs are expected to post and maintain regular office hours.

**Second Job**

GTAs and DAs normally may not hold any other employment for the duration of their appointment. Students who wish to hold a second job must follow the second job policy.

**Performance Evaluation**

GTA and DA performance will be reviewed using a survey at the end of each academic year.

**Funding Via Grants and Contracts: Graduate Research Assistantships and Hourly Employment**

Graduate Research Assistantships or GRAs are a funding source that involves students working with a faculty member (generally, the study Principal Investigator, or PI) who has research grant or contract funding. Funding is similar to GTAs and DAs in that the student receives a stipend and tuition remission. Fees may also be covered, depending on the PI’s ability to pay. As with GTAs and DAs, students on GRAs must enroll in at least 9 credit hours per semester (maximum 15).

Unlike GTAs and DAs, GRAs are offered to students by the PIs directly and are not assigned by the department. Further, stipend levels for GRAs are set by the PI and not by the department.

Students can be funded on GRAs on projects whose PIs are in or outside of the department. All PIs who wish to fund students on GRAs will inform the Director of Graduate Studies. S/he can facilitate selection
of appropriate students and will work to ensure that all departmental guidelines are followed for funding students.

Students may also be offered hourly positions on research grants or contracts. Unlike GRAs, hourly positions do not necessarily include tuition remission. Students hired as hourly workers need only enroll in the minimum number of credits as dictated by their program and the department handbooks. PIs will clarify with students whether or not the position is a GRA or hourly position.

**Termination of Funding**

Student funding is determined annually and funding in one academic year does not guarantee funding in subsequent years. The department will strive to fund students for the first four years in the program. However, because funding fluctuates, funding is only guaranteed in the year it is formally offered.

GRAs, GTAs, and DAs normally end when the period of appointment is concluded and the term of the assistantship agreement is fulfilled. An appointment also may end when the grant or contract supporting the student expires, for whatever reason, even if that occurs before the end of the student’s current appointment. Otherwise, a GRA, GTA, or DA may be terminated for the following reasons:

1. Resignation for cause by the student, such resignation to be in writing for approval by the department chair or program director, with a copy to the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies;
2. Failure of the graduate assistant to perform assigned duties adequately, such termination to be recommended by the department chair or program director, with a copy to the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies;
3. Failure of the graduate assistant to remain in good academic standing or to adhere to enrollment policies in accordance with this policy statement.

Any stipend funds remaining after the termination of a graduate assistantship revert to the funding department or program and may be reallocated to another graduate student. If students withdraw from classes or programs or reduce enrollment below full time, tuition/fees and stipends may be rescinded, and students will be responsible for returning all funds to the University. Exceptions are made on a case-by-case basis by the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies on the recommendation of the student’s graduate program director.

A graduate student who believes that his or her graduate assistantship has been terminated unjustly and who has exhausted all departmental and school appeal procedures, may appeal the decision in writing to the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies.

**Other Sources of Financial Support**

In addition to GRAs, GTAs, and DAs, there are several other forms of financial aid available to graduate students. These include:

1. **Paid Practica.** Some practicum placements may offer a stipend and are available to eligible students in the Clinical and Counseling Psychology Programs as a source of funding. Paid practica may not include tuition or fees. Students receiving GRAs, GTA, or DAs may not accept a paid practicum position without securing the necessary permissions (see Second Job policy in this Handbook).
2. **Phi Kappa Phi Fellowship.** A tuition stipend awarded to one student at each the master’s and doctoral levels on each campus. Students apply for this award at the beginning of the Spring semester. The Psychology Department's Graduate Committee reviews all applicants and submits a nominee to the Humanities and Sciences Graduate Academic Committee. The final recipient is selected from among the applicants nominated by each College or School on the academic campus.

3. **Jesse Hibbs Fellowship.** A tuition stipend awarded to one student on the academic campus by the VCU Women's Club. The recipient must be a woman graduate student with a dependent child.

4. **APA Dissertation Research Awards.** A stipend awarded by APA to support dissertation research. Up to three students may be nominated by the Department's Graduate Committee each year (final selection is made by APA). Students must be a student affiliate of APA and must have successfully defended their dissertation proposal. [View the application information for the APA Dissertation Research Awards.](#)

5. **APA Student Travel Awards.** A stipend awarded by APA to support student travel to the APA convention. Up to three students may be nominated by the Department's Graduate Committee each year (final selection is made by APA). Students must be a student affiliate of APA and must have had a research paper, poster or other contribution accepted for presentation at the annual APA convention. [View the application information for APA Student Travel Awards.](#)

6. **Other Financial Support at VCU.** Graduate students are able to apply for a number of positions at VCU outside of the Psychology Department, including GTA positions (e.g., Residence Hall Directors, Career Center). The Department makes an effort whenever possible to notify appropriate students of these positions when they become available.

7. **Loans.** Students are also eligible for student loans and other financial support arranged through the VCU Financial Aid Office.

8. **External Financial Support.** Financial support in the form of fellowships, grants and dissertation research awards is available from a variety of external sources.

9. **Department Awards.** Each year a variety of awards are made available through the Department. Please watch for the announcements.

10. **VCU Financial Aid Office.** Because deadlines are constantly changing, please visit the [University Financial Aid website.](#) All external financial aid of this type is independent of the department and is the individual student’s responsibility.
Teaching Practicum

The Graduate Teaching Practicum was developed to help graduate students develop their teaching skills. The program, which is designed to meet the needs of students who plan to pursue academic careers requiring experience in teaching, is based on a mentoring model of skill development. All graduate teaching assistants whose roles include teaching responsibilities (i.e., labs in PSYC 214 317) MUST take this course in the first year they hold the position. Throughout the semester, students and the instructor/supervisor will examine issues related to teaching the particular class, including identifying goals, developing a syllabus, designing evaluation procedures, lecturing, helping students with special problems, and assigning grades.

This course is open to all full-time graduate students. Both GTAs/DAs and those who are not funded through GTAs/DAs are eligible. It should be noted, however, that a student who is not a funded GTA/DA should not be given the duties of an assistant. If practicum students take part in grading assignments, then the supervisor must be prepared to give them constructive feedback concerning their effectiveness as a grader. Similarly, if a practicum student delivers a lecture, the supervisor should be present during the class and later provide the student with suggestions for improvement. Thus, practicum students who are not funded GTAs should not, for example, be given an entire set of papers to grade or be asked to teach a substantial number of class sessions.
Ethical Guidelines for Research

Adherence to Ethical Standards

All students should be familiar with, and conduct their research in accord with the American Psychological Association's Ethical Principles of Psychologists. Depending on the nature of the research population this might include Principle 9: Research with Human Participants; or Principle 10: Care and Use of Animals.

Review of Research Proposals

All research involving human participants conducted by graduate students must be reviewed by the University Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to commencing the research. Research involving laboratory animals must be approved by the VCU Animal Care and Use Program.
Introductory Psychology Research Participant Pool

The Department of Psychology has established a set of guidelines governing research projects that involve students recruited from introductory psychology classes as research participants. These apply to all Psychology 101 sections taught during the Fall and Spring semesters, and all summer semester courses offering research participation or extra credit. The guidelines apply to both faculty and graduate student researchers, and describe how students can be recruited for research, procedural steps to take in conducting research, and researchers’ ethical obligations.

Recruitment of Participants

Researchers conducting studies involving students drawn from the Research Participant Pool (RPP) can recruit participants in several ways. These include:

1. **Electronic postings.** Each semester, researchers will be notified about the procedures to follow to use the Department-sponsored online RPP software. This software is used to recruit participants and to manage the research credit accounts of all students in the RPP.

2. **Persuasive recruitment.** In some instances, researchers may prefer to discuss the project with prospective participants to elicit appropriate response rates. Such arrangements must be made by contacting the instructors that permit persuasive recruitment in their classes and gaining their consent. In general, class time is not to be spent completing questionnaires. If graduate students are to solicit participants, they should be adequately briefed concerning the appropriate approach. The method of recruitment should be used sparingly and avoided where possible to maintain a “level playing field” among the many researchers seeking participants. In general, electronic postings of studies should be relied upon.

Procedures for Using the Research Participant Pool

1. **IRB Approval.** Researchers who wish to utilize the RPP must first obtain IRB approval to conduct each study. The IRB approval form and approved Research Plan must be registered by the RPP coordinator before recruitment can begin.

2. **Recruitment.** Researchers will be told about the policies established concerning recruitment procedures. Under no circumstances should a researcher ask instructors for permission to recruit in their classrooms if the instructor has a policy of non-recruitment.

3. **Conducting the Research.** Researchers are urged to conduct their research in a professional manner. Participants should be given explicit instructions concerning time and place as well as a cancellation number. Researchers should avoid canceling sessions without notifying participants.

4. **Credit Acknowledgment.** Because of the bookkeeping burden and the many demands placed on instructors' time, researchers are responsible for maintaining the records of student participants. The RPP software used by the Department allows researchers to enter earned credit information about their participants. Please note:
   a. Under no circumstances can extra credit in addition to that actually earned be given to participants as an incentive to participate. The length of the research study determines the
amount of credit earned in the RPP, in accord with a time spent = credit earned equivalency policy. A 1/2 hour session = .5 credits earned, 1 hour session = 1 credit, 1.5 hour session = 1.5 credits earned, etc.

b. Individuals who refuse to participate during the informed consent process must be given .5 credits (equivalent to ½ hour) for their time spent in the study session, in accord with the time: credit equivalency policy noted above in 4a.

c. Individuals who cannot participate due to equipment failure, incomplete groups, researcher missing the session, etc. must be given credit in accord with the same policy noted above in 4a.

Researchers are responsible for making certain that participants receive credit, and in a timely manner (i.e., within 48 hours or less of the study’s completion). Anyone who fails to give participants credit for their help where credit is due will be denied access to the RPP in the future. Additional information about the credit procedures should be obtained from the RPP director.

**Ethical Obligations**

All research using participants from the RPP must FIRST be approved by the IRB. In addition to obtaining ethical approval, the researcher is REQUIRED to follow the IRB-approved study procedures and to make the research experience meaningful for the participants. To achieve this goal, researchers must follow appropriate ethical guidelines concerning debriefing, informed consent, and feedback.

1. **Debriefing.** Participants should be told about the basic purposes of the research. Although in some cases this feedback must be kept fairly rudimentary, the participant must be told about the basic question under investigation. If the design of the research makes post-session debriefing impossible, participants should be sent written information when the project is concluded.

2. **Informed Consent.** Most research involving participants recruited from the RPP requires the use of IRB-approved informed consent. Any exceptions to this must also be IRB-approved.

3. **Feedback.** Researchers should encourage participants to contact them if they would like to learn the results of the investigation.
Committees and Personnel Involved in the Graduate Program

**Student's Graduate Advisor**

Each student shall have an advisor selected from the faculty in his/her graduate program. Students should meet regularly with their advisors to discuss issues such as curriculum matters, progress in the graduate program, career goals, and other concerns. A close student-advisor relationship is considered an extremely important part of graduate education. The advisor plays a very important mentoring role for the graduate student and is responsible for the student's socialization into the profession. The advisor also serves as a liaison between the student and the student's Graduate Program Committee. For this reason, it is essential that the advisor be informed about the student's progress at all times. During formal student evaluations, the advisor will provide the student's program committee with information about the student's progress in the program, and will convey feedback from the program committee to the student. In most instances, the advisor also serves as the student's research advisor. In instances where students have a research advisor outside of their graduate program, they will also maintain an *academic* advisor within their program.

In most programs, the student’s advisor is assigned at admission into the program. The advisor can be changed, however, for any reason (for example, if another advisor is closer in line to the student’s interests). The student, the old and new advisors, and the program director should work together to help the transition to a different advisor.

**Graduate Program Committee**

Each student's Graduate Program Committee consists of all of the graduate faculty within the student's program or other Psychology Department faculty members who have an Affiliate membership in the program (i.e., Clinical, Counseling, Biopsychology, Developmental, Social, and Health Psychology Programs) and is chaired by the Program Director. The Graduate Program Committee addresses all matters related to the training of students within the program. This committee is responsible for the program's curriculum and requirements, selection of graduate students, and evaluation of graduate students in the program.

**Psychology Department Graduate Academic Committee (GAC)**

The Psychology Department Graduate Committee consists of the Director of Graduate Studies, the Graduate Program Directors, and the Associate Director of Academic Operations. This committee addresses issues related to the Department's core curriculum and all Departmental degree requirements; assigns all fellowships and Department Assistantships; nominates students for University Awards and honors; evaluates all proposals to add, delete or revise courses in the graduate curriculum; and reviews, updates, and makes appropriate changes in the *Graduate Bulletin*, and other materials describing the graduate program.
Miscellaneous

**Graduate Student Offices**

Graduate students in the Department, when possible, are assigned office space to use in the performance of their assistantship responsibilities as well as for academic purposes. An assessment of graduate student office needs and available space is usually made at the end of the academic year, and new assignments are made at the beginning of the Fall semester. Office assignments are based on needs, priorities, and assistantship assignments. Students may be assigned to space in any of the buildings occupied by the Department and may not necessarily be assigned the same office space in consecutive years.

**Mailboxes**

Mailboxes for graduate students are located in the main office in 806 W. Franklin Street. Campus mail, departmental notices and memos, and correspondence from the student's program and Department are placed in student mailboxes. Students are therefore expected to check their mailboxes on a regular basis.

**Computer Accounts and Email**

Students are responsible for establishing a university email address and should check their email regularly. Many departmental notices as well as the weekly calendar are distributed by email. E-mail is also the easiest way for faculty and students to communicate. Email is the official means of communication at VCU. Students are expected to check their VCU account on a regular basis. The Department will use only the student’s VCU email address.

**Student Directory, Change of Personal Information, and Pay Information**

A Department Directory is distributed each year. Students should make certain that they notify the Department’s Service Center and Human Resources (through Employee Self Service from the myVCU page) of any changes in address/telephone numbers or personal information. Students should also keep an accurate address and telephone number on file with the University Registrar. If a student moves, it is also extremely important to make note of this change through the Self Service Banner system on your myVCU page. Failure to do so could result in not receiving important forms (e.g., W2) that are mailed to the home address. Pay information can also be found in Employee Self-Service. The site is available through a link in the Human Resource Web site.
Appendix A: Program-Specific Handbooks

Access the program-specific handbooks.