

## Undergraduate Thesis Information

### **Overview:**

Most undergraduate degree programs in psychology offer students formal opportunities to enhance their research skills and experience. The most common means of doing this is by completing a series of research and methods-focused courses and an undergraduate thesis. Besides providing a unique chance to work individually with a faculty member on an original research project, the completion of an undergraduate thesis is an important first step for students contemplating graduate school. Acceptance into the thesis option is determined by a competitive application process in the student's penultimate (that is, next-to-last) year of their program. This document provides an overview of the thesis stream and how to apply.

### **Q: What is a thesis?**

A: An undergraduate thesis involves empirical or theoretical research supervised by a faculty member. The description of the project, including the results and interpretation of the research are ultimately described in a scholarly paper typically known as a "thesis". For most students, this will be the first opportunity to do their own research from conception of the idea through data collection, analysis and presentation.

### **Q: Who should do an undergraduate thesis?**

A: Completing a thesis is not the only way to explore psychological research at a deeper level, or to gain entrance into grad school, but it is perhaps the most typical way. It gives students an opportunity to work closely with a faculty member on a project of mutual interest, outside of a classroom setting. If you have a strong desire to do original research, including collecting and analyzing your own data, and you meet the entry requirements, you should consider this option. If you're at all thinking of graduate school, completing a thesis is strongly advised. Even if you're not thinking about graduate school the thesis option can be a very rewarding and enriching experience.

### **Requirements:**

"Thesis-stream" students will need to complete PSY 711, PSY961 and PSY971 as part of the 40 courses in their program. So, in practice, all psychology students follow the same curriculum for their first two years. In 3rd year, however, students planning to apply for enrollment in the thesis project courses in their 4th year should take PSY 711: Advanced Research Methods and Statistics. Students will complete the two required thesis courses (PSY961: Thesis Project I and PSY971: Thesis Project II) in their final year. Please note that successful completion of PSY961 is required for entry into PSY971.

**Q: What if I haven't taken PSY711 yet? Can I take it at the same time as PSY961?**

A: It is highly preferred that PSY711 be successfully completed by the time of application, but in unusual circumstances, special permission may be granted to take these courses concurrently. Under no circumstances will students be allowed to enroll in PSY971 without successful completion of PSY711.

Entry into the thesis option will be granted on a competitive basis, so students should strive for the highest marks possible to be considered. Previous research experience is highly desirable, although not an absolute requirement. To provide some guidance on what is "competitive", note that the application requirement for Ryerson's graduate program in Psychology is a minimum A- grade point average in the last two years of study. Other graduate programs have similar grade requirements. Since thesis students often go on to graduate school, they should aspire to similar grades. Although the grade cut-off to apply for entry into the thesis option, will be 3.00, entrance to the program is very competitive and there is no guarantee that students with a CGPA less than a "B+" (3.33) will be accepted.

**Application Process:**

By the end of the second term of the penultimate year of their program (i.e., the end of the Winter semester of 3<sup>rd</sup> year for most students), students must apply to the department for permission to enroll in PSY961. There are really two components to the process. The first is to find a suitable faculty advisor in the weeks and months leading up to the application, and the second is to submit the completed application and associated documentation to the Undergraduate Program Administrator (Ms Lisa Vuong, JOR800) by the April deadline.

**Q: But if the thesis application is not due until April, how do I complete my course intentions form a month earlier, in March? And how do I register myself in these courses in the Fall term?**

A: When planning your Fall and Winter schedules, you should organize course intentions independent of PSY961/971 (i.e., as if you were NOT accepted into the thesis stream). If and when you are accepted (likely early in the summer term, a few weeks after application), you will work with the Program Administrator to make the necessary adjustments to your timetable. This most commonly involves 'dropping' a previously selected course to make room for PSY961/ 971.

Remember, in the Fall, you won't be able to enroll yourself. Since the thesis courses require 'department consent', you can only be enrolled directly by the program administrator.

*Finding an Advisor:* Students are responsible for finding a suitable and willing faculty supervisor for their work. This faculty member must co-sign the application indicating agreement to supervise the student by the April deadline, but students should devote significant time to meet with *several* different faculty members in the weeks leading up to the application date to find a suitable supervisor-student match.

**Q: How / when / where can I find an advisor?**

A: It may take some time and thought to find a professor who is suitable and willing to supervise your work. You will first want to find out about the kind of work the

various faculty members in psychology are interested in. You can do this by reading [faculty bios](#) on the psychology department website. You might also wish to speak with the Undergraduate Thesis Coordinator (Dr. Michelle Dionne) for some ideas. Finally, there are a few openings for students at different stages of their degree to do [paid or volunteer research](#) with professors in the department, and this can lead to thesis supervision opportunities later on. Even if you're in first or second year, you should think about the thesis as a long term plan and start making individual research connections with faculty members now.

Feel free to talk about your thesis interests with your professors -- in class, during office hours, or some other time. Although it may seem intimidating, remember that faculty members are typically delighted to have a chance to discuss their research with eager students, so go ahead and start that conversation. You should also think about attending a research talk / colloquium/ seminar in the department. These are held once a month throughout the school year and this will give you a good idea what research really is and how it is communicated.

When you finally have a formal meeting with a potential advisor, most will --at a minimum-- want to receive a curriculum vitae (a "CV"; this is a resume that lists your academic experiences), see a copy of your academic transcript, and he or she will likely ask a number of questions about your research interests, work habits and long term career goals. Be sure to think about these things in advance of your meeting. Again, faculty members will meet with several different potential thesis students from January through March, so don't expect an answer about acceptance right away. In fact, faculty members will likely NOT make a decision until very near the application deadline.

*Submitting the Application:* Once you've found a faculty member who has agreed to be your advisor, you will still need to formally apply to the department for entry into PSY961. Therefore, you will need to complete and submit the "application" document along with a copy of your transcript (a print out from RAMSS is fine) to the Undergraduate Office by the deadline. A copy of this application form is available on the department website. Successful candidates will receive an official notice of acceptance early in the summer (so it's important to leave current summer-time contact info on the application form), and further enrollment information will be provided at that time.

***Q. What happens in the thesis courses? Do students attend classes like in other courses?***

A: In the first term (PSY 961) there will be a few (mandatory) meetings of all the thesis students and the thesis coordinator. Early in the term, students will attend a series of presentations on general information required to complete the thesis (e.g., writing ethics proposals, APA style, etc). A special information session will also be held on applying to graduate or professional schools. Students should be meeting with their faculty advisor throughout the term (on a schedule determined between them) to start developing their proposals. By the end of the term, students will present their research proposal in class, and submit a written copy. The written copy will be submitted to the advisor and the thesis coordinator (as second reader) who will jointly assign a grade. The course syllabus will be available in late

summer. In some cases, students will start work on their thesis in the summer between 3rd and 4th years.

In the second term, (PSY971) students will (with faculty oversight and guidance) gather and analyze their own data, and finally write the thesis. There will not be regular class meetings throughout the term but students will need to consult regularly with their advisor as well as the thesis coordinator. The thesis will be presented as a poster on a special thesis poster presentation day at the end of the term. As is the case with PSY961, the written copy of the thesis will be evaluated by both the advisor and the thesis coordinator.

**Suggestion for additional reading:**

Morgan, B.L., & Korschgen, A.J. (2009). *Majoring in psych? Career options for psychology undergraduates (4<sup>th</sup> Ed)*. Toronto, ON: Pearson Allyn & Bacon. Call number in Ryerson Library: [BF76 .M67 2008](#)

Silvia, P.J., Delaney, P.F., & Marcovitch, S. (2009). *What psychology majors could (and should) be doing : An informal guide to research experience and professional skills*. Washington, DC : APA. Call # [BF76.5 .S497 2009](#)

*For more information, speak with:*  
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